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Empathy as Added Value in Predicting Donation Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Past behavior and sociodemographics represent traditional predictors of charitable giving. The present study examines, in a real fundraising setting, whether measures of empathy (i.e., empathic concern and personal distress) can improve these predictions. The findings confirm the relevance of traditional predictor sets and the added value of including measures of empathy. Empathic concern positively affects the donation decision. In addition, empathy negatively affects the donor's generosity toward one charity. However, for people with high empathic concern, considering only generosity toward one charity could be misleading because such people are more likely to donate to different charities. This result has implications for overall generosity. Therefore, a clear distinction between both personality traits is necessary.

1. Introduction

Understanding charitable giving is a crucial element in attracting and retaining private donors, and traditional predictors rely on prior behavior and sociodemographics. The former captures recency, frequency, and monetary value (i.e., RFM variables), whereas the latter reflect features such as income, age and gender. Prior studies also regularly consider intentions as good indicators of consumer behavior. This study examines whether and how psychological measures of empathy might improve traditional models of charitable giving. Using hierarchical multiple regression analysis, this study investigates the incremental value of including measures of empathy together with traditional predictor sets, with a focus on empathic concern and personal distress as personality traits. According to Davis (1983a), both constructs involve emotional dimensions of empathy and reflect distinctive feelings toward unfortunate others or the self, in that empathic concern is other oriented, and personal distress is self oriented.

Whereas previous research proposes empathy to explain helping behavior, this study notes the predictive power of both personality measures on top of past behavior, intentions, and sociodemographics. In particular, this investigation considers two distinctive aspects of charitable giving: the decision to contribute and the extent of generosity (i.e., donation amount, assuming a donation). As another important contribution, for both dimensions, this article reports the relevance of the predictor sets in a real charitable fundraising setting. A first study uses the database of a European charity to calculate RFM variables and data augmentation through questionnaires to collect information about the other predictor sets. With transactional data about responses to charitable fundraising appeals, the real-life study considers the dependent measure of donation behavior toward one charity. Therefore, the study tests both models of donation decision and generosity for a single charity. The results demonstrate the added value of psychological measures of empathy; the two emotional

dimensions of empathy have differential influences on the decision to donate and generosity. Because of an unexpected result, a second study investigates reported donation behavior across multiple charities, to explore whether empathic concern relates differently to generosity toward one versus multiple charities. Considering only generosity toward one charity can produce incorrect interpretations; assessments should include donation behavior across different charities.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows: the next section provides the theoretical background regarding traditional predictor sets of charitable giving, followed by an elaboration of the role of empathy in helping behaviors, which leads to the research question and hypotheses. Next, this paper presents the methodology for a first study in cooperation with a European charity, which tests the research question and predictions derived from the theoretical background in a real-life setting. Although the first study measures charitable giving in a real-life setting, this approach means the study ignores donation behavior toward other charities. Therefore, the next section reports the methodology for a second data collection and investigation of the relationship of empathy with reported donation behavior across all possible different charities. After the presentation of the results from both studies, this paper concludes with a discussion of the results, suggestions for further research, and implications for fundraising management.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Charitable giving

Recent interest in understanding helping or charitable behavior continues to grow. Existing studies capture a variety of helping behavior, such as volunteering, donating blood, or monetary contributions. However, most research investigates helping in a laboratory setting by measuring intentions to help. Some academics (e.g., List, 2008) stress the growing importance of field studies, because of the possible discrepancy between a laboratory setting

and a field situation, yet few studies investigate monetary donation behavior in real life. In this context, direct mail is one of the most important instruments for fundraising and the most successful medium for individual donations (Direct Marketing Association, 2010). For monetary gifts and helping in general, two decisions are important to potential donors. On the one hand, the potential donor must decide to help or not to help. On the other hand, after deciding to help, the donor decides how much to help. Investigations of helping behavior often neglect this latter aspect. Therefore, this study investigates the decision to donate money as well as the generosity of the donor in a real-life direct mail fundraising setting.

2.2. Traditional predictors of charitable giving

Direct marketing and direct mail fundraising generally use past response behavior as the best predictor of future responses. Most conceptualizations of past donation behavior rely on recency, frequency, and monetary (RFM) value. In a charitable context, recency involves the number of days since the last donation; frequency usually reflects the number of donations over a set period of time; and monetary value is the total amount donated by a particular donor (Bitran and Mondschein, 1996). Prior studies show that past donation behavior drives both donation decision and generosity (e.g., Bult, van der Scheer, and Wansbeek, 1997; Jonker, Piersma, and Van den Poel, 2004). From a practical point of view, the computation of RFM variables is relatively easy, because the charity stores the information in its database and does not need to perform an additional data collection.

In addition to past behavior, this study investigates the usefulness of donation intentions. Using the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), De Cannière, De Pelsmacker, and Geuens (2009) report that behavioral intentions predict purchase behavior, even in combination with actual past behavior. Although these authors investigate purchase behavior rather than charitable giving, they conclude that intentions capture unique variance in

purchase decisions that past behavior does not. Accordingly, the present study investigates if intentions contribute to explaining charitable giving, beyond real-life past behavior.

Despite overwhelming evidence that RFM variables are important predictors, different studies also investigate other predictors, most of which, such as sociodemographic variables, require additional data collections. In line with prior research findings, this study expects that age positively affects charitable giving (e.g., Van Slyke and Brooks, 2005). This prediction also matches current practices in fundraising; charities target older people. Starting with the integrated theory of volunteer work (Wilson and Musick, 1997), Bekkers (2006) also finds that financial capital promotes traditional philanthropy (i.e., monetary donations), such that the availability of resources in the form of financial capital reduces the cost of charitable giving. For people with higher incomes, a $100 donation to a charitable organization is less costly than for those earning lower incomes, for example. Therefore, income should be an important driver of generosity. Considering Pessemier, Bemmaor, and Hanssens's (1977) finding that women are more willing than men to donate body parts, gender might be relevant as well. Finally, this study examines whether and how measures of empathy might improve traditional models.

> Research Question 1: To what extent are the traditional predictor sets of past behavior, intentions, and sociodemographics important for predicting charitable giving in a direct mail fundraising setting, and can the inclusion of empathy-related personality measures improve these models?

2.3. Empathy as a predictor of charitable giving

In the past two decades, studies that propose empathy as an explanation for prosocial behavior grows substantially. In general, these studies acknowledge the multidimensional nature of empathy, with cognitive and affective dimensions (e.g., Strayer, 1987), as well as the diversity of possible emotional responses to a distressed target (e.g., Eisenberg and Fabes,

1990). One research stream investigates empathy as a mental state and manipulates empathy generation (e.g., Batson, 1991). These studies examine how reported mental states, including sympathy and personal distress, induce helping behavior. In contrast to this mental state approach, because most people demonstrate a predominant manner when reacting to someone in need, a second research stream defines empathy as a personality trait and investigates how individual differences in empathy affect helping behavior (e.g., Davis, 1983b). A well-known measurement of empathy is the interpersonal reactivity index (Davis, 1983a), which demonstrates considerable convergent and discriminant validity in various studies (Davis, 1994). More than 800 studies refer to this measure. Accordingly, the current study also investigates empathy as a personality trait according to the interpersonal reactivity index (Davis, 1983a) and focuses on the affective dimension. According to Davis (1983a), this affective dimension consists of two negative emotional components. Empathic concern refers to feelings of sympathy and compassion for distressed others and is other rather than self oriented (Davis, 1994). Personal distress is another affective response the observer experiences, though in the form of self-oriented feelings of personal anxiety, discomfort, and unease in tense interpersonal settings in response to unfortunate others. Consistent with this view, the empathy–altruism hypothesis addresses the distinction between empathic concern and personal distress and differentiates altruistically versus egoistically motivated behavior (e.g., Batson, 1991). This hypothesis further states that a confrontation with others in need may increase levels of empathic concern or personal distress. People who feel empathic concern focus on the person in need, with a selfless and altruistic motivation to reduce his or her distress. In contrast, when people experience personal distress, attention focuses on the self, which leads to an egoistic helping motivation to reduce that distress. Both types of motivations likely stimulate helping behaviors (Bendapudi, Singh, and Bendapudi, 1996).

Most prior empathy studies investigate various volunteering and helping behaviors through self-reported questionnaires or laboratory studies, leading to a lack of research on the relationship between empathy and donations in a real fundraising setting. Therefore, this study explores the relevance of personality measures of empathy for predicting monetary contributions, based on direct-mail fundraising campaigns sent to active donors. With respect to the decision to help, considerable evidence shows that heightened feelings of empathic concern lead people to help a regrettable other. For example, Davis (1983b) demonstrates that higher empathic concern scores align with a greater tendency to contribute time or money. People with higher empathic concern thus decide to help to reduce the stress of regrettable others. This view is in accordance with altruistically motivated helping, because the motivation is directed toward the goal of increasing the other's welfare. Less research notes the relationship between personal distress and helping (e.g., Unger and Thumuluri, 1997). Batson (1991) finds that feelings of personal distress lead to helping only if avoiding the provision of help is difficult. Because traditional philanthropy often occurs in response to personal solicitations for contributions, escaping helping situations without contributing is difficult (Bekkers, 2006). For active donors (i.e., people who receive at least one charitable appeal each month and donated to the charity previously), escaping may be not easy for them. As discussed before, personal distress often relates to an egoistic response system indicating that individuals high on personal distress help in order to reduce their own distress in the first place. This egoistically motivated helping directs toward the end-state goal of increasing the helper's own welfare. Therefore, the personality traits of empathic concern and personal distress reflect clearly distinctive motivations (i.e., altruistically versus egoistically motivated helping), but both should influence the donation decision positively.

Hypothesis 1a: Higher empathic concern increases the likelihood of a decision to donate money.

Hypothesis 1b: Higher personal distress increases the likelihood of a decision to donate

money.

These hypotheses align with negative mood repair theories, which state that people prefer to feel good and, when feeling bad, have a universal goal to repair their negative mood (Buss, 2000). When confronted with needy others, people subject to both personal distress and empathic concern experience negative feelings. Personal distress may induce emotions such as sadness, guilt, or anxiety; empathic concern likely elicits emotions such as sympathy and concern. In both cases, helping by donating could relieve negative emotions in a confrontation with other people's problems (Dillard and Nabi, 2006).

Yet personal distress may be somewhat weaker than empathic concern (Eisenberg, Wentzel, and Jerry, 1998). Griffin, Babin, Attaway and Darden (1993) consider empathy with a mental state approach, rather than as a personality trait, and demonstrate that personal distress is less relevant for intentions to make a charitable donation. Therefore, considering the effect size of both constructs, the relationship between empathic concern and the decision to donate should be stronger than that between personal distress and the donation decision.

Hypothesis 1c: The empathic concern personality trait is a stronger predictor of the

decision to donate money than personal distress.

In general, previous empathy studies consider the likelihood or decision to help, rather than the amount of helping. In this context though, by investigating the total amount donated in the previous year to voluntary associations, charities, or nonprofit organizations, Bekkers (2006) finds a positive relationship between empathic concern and generosity. Higher empathic concern instigates higher total contributions. This finding corresponds with the view that people with high empathic concern scores are other oriented and want to increase the welfare of unfortunate others. For personal distress, the relationship with generosity is less clear. The negative feeling is self oriented, so any donation, even a low one, might provide a feeling of

relief. If a mere donation satisfies the egoistic motivation and repairs the negative mood, a generous gift is not essential. Hence, people with high personal distress levels may donate smaller amounts.

Hypothesis 2a: Among donors, higher empathic concern increases generosity toward the charity.

Hypothesis 2b: Among donors, higher personal distress decreases generosity toward the charity.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual model of the concepts under study.

[Figure 1 here.]

3. Method

3.1. Study 1

This large-scale study gathered transactional data and self-reported information from active donors to a European charity. Figure 2 represents the time window. In the beginning of 2008, the independent variables are collected. The first type of data concerning the independent measures includes past donation behavior, as stored in the charity's database. For the self-reported information, a direct mail fundraising campaign by the charity enclosed the survey as well. The response rate was 6% and involved 1,385 donors who returned the survey. The questionnaire asked about intentions to donate by the end of 2008, birth date, income, and gender, as well as empathic concern and personal distress measures. For the dependent measures, at the beginning of 2009, the charity provided the real donation behavior of the respondents in subsequent 2008 campaigns. All potential donors received fundraising appeals monthly. In the first model, to predict the decision to donate in the remainder of 2008, the dependent measure was a dummy variable that indicated whether the respondent answered the direct mail campaigns after the survey but before the end of 2008. The second model, to predict the total amount of donations by the end of 2008 (conditional on the donation

decision), used as a dependent measure the total amount donated during the dependent period. As in Reingen (1982), regarding the contribution level, a log $(X + 1)$ transformation was performed on the data.

[Figure 2 here.]

The four sets of independent measures are as follow. First, the calculation of the traditional RFM variables relied on transactions stored in the database of the charity. This first set includes the number of days since the last donation, number of donations in the past, and log $(X + 1)$ transformation of the total amount of donations in the previous period for each donor at the beginning of 2008. These variables originate from real transactional data, whereas the other sets are self-reported. Second, to measure donation intentions toward the charity of interest, the questionnaire asked how much money each respondent intended to donate during the rest of 2008. Because this variable relates to donation sizes, a log $(X + 1)$ transformation was appropriate. Third, three sociodemographic characteristics constitute the next step: age (date of birth), income (according to several ranges), and gender (male or female). Fourth, the last set of independent measures relates to both emotional dimensions of empathy (Davis, 1983a; cfr. Appendix), empathic concern and personal distress. The empathic concern scale contains items such as, "I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me" and "I am often quite touched by things that I see happen". The personal distress scale includes, "It occasionally embarrasses me when someone tells me their problems" and "Being in a tense emotional situation scares me". The first step for assessing the validity of the constructs was a factor analysis of the initial 14 items developed to measure the two dimensions of empathy. Items with loadings of less than .50 and cross-loadings higher than .40 were subject to deletion, reflecting content considerations to minimize any reduction in the meaning of the constructs. This process excluded one of the seven empathic concern items and two of the seven personal distress items. The Cronbach's coefficient alphas indicate

scale reliability, with .64 for empathic concern and .69 for personal distress. No substantial improvement appears after deleting one or more items. The correlation between both dimensions of empathy is very low (r = .001, *p* > .10). The mean value of empathic concern is 5.7 (s = .86), and average personal distress is 4.1 (s = 1.09).

Because the main purpose of this study is to investigate the added value of diverse predictor sets, hierarchical multiple regression analysis regresses charitable giving on the four sets of independent measures. With this estimation technique, additional variables progressively enter the model. Each set equals one block in the regression, and a stepwise selection technique selects the best predictors within each block. The first set contains the RFM variables from the database, because this information is easily available. In the last block, both dimensions of empathy determine the added value of psychological measures. Empathy enters the hierarchical model last, primarily because the main goal is to investigate the practical relevance of collecting information about this personality trait. Collecting data about empathy requires the highest effort, associated with measuring 14 items. With the hierarchical multiple regression analysis, the authors evaluate changes in the proportion of variance explained, as well as the statistical significance of these changes. A first regression analysis reveals the decision to donate by considering all survey participants; the second model predicts generosity and only includes donors during the dependent period.

3.2. Study 2

The previous study investigated real donation behavior from a database rather than self-reported donation behavior. However, by focusing only on one charity, Study 1 neglected donation behavior across multiple charities. Therefore, at the beginning of 2009, the authors posted links on various Web sites to a self-reported questionnaire that collected information about the total donation behavior of 2,530 donors. The authors also provided an offline version of the questionnaire. This second data collection provided detailed information about

the number of supported charities in 2008, the total amount donated in 2008, and the personality measures of empathic concern and personal distress (Davis, 1983a). Another factor analysis served to assess the validity of the constructs with the initial 14 empathy items. Poor loadings suggested the deletion of three items: one empathic concern and two personal distress. The Cronbach's alphas were .70 for empathic concern and .80 for personal distress. The correlation between the two dimensions of empathy is rather weak (r = .08, $p < .01$). The mean value of empathic concern is 5 (s = .82), and the average personal distress value is 3.8 (s = 1.05). This data collection enables the calculation of the donor's overall breadth (e.g., Webb, Green, and Brashear, 2000), that is, the number of different charities supported by the donor in 2008. In nonprofit marketing, multi-charity donations is an unexplored domain. In addition, this study provides insight into total generosity (i.e., across all charities).

4. Results

4.1. Study 1: Two models of donation behavior toward one charity

In both models, empathy is a significant predictor, beyond the traditional predictor sets of past behavior, intentions, and sociodemographics. At each step in the logistic regression, the -2LL decreases significantly, and at each step in the linear regression, the R^2 value improves significantly. The importance of the separate blocks in the hierarchical regression analysis indicates that traditional predictors seem more substantively important than empathy. Although empathy explains a relatively low level of variance, the result is significant.

Table 1 contains the results of the hierarchical logistic regression with the decision to donate as the dependent variable. The overall model is significant ($p < .001$). In the first block of the logistic regression, the variable selection technique reveals frequency as the first variable; frequency is positively associated with the donation decision. Therefore, more past donations indicate the donor is more likely to donate in the future. A negative effect of recency implies that as the number of days since the last gift increases, the propensity to

donate decreases. In the second block, intentions increase the explained variance in the decision to donate, beyond past behavior. In line with prior research, age is an important predictor: older people are more likely to respond to charitable direct mails. The last block produces a significant improvement of the model, though only the empathic concern personality trait explains a significant amount of variance in the donation decision, beyond that of traditional predictor sets, with significant decrease in deviance. Hypothesis 1a receives empirical support, because the positive coefficient estimate indicates that as empathic concern increases, so does the propensity to donate. With regard to personal distress, Hypothesis 1b receives no support. Empathic concern is more important in the donation decision than personal distress, in support of Hypothesis 1c. The first hypothesis thus receives partial confirmation.

[Table 1 here.]

Table 2 summarizes the results with respect to generosity. The regression model is significant ($p < .001$), and again, past behavior explains most of the variance. The significant positive effect of monetary value indicates that a person who was more generous in the past likely will be more generous in the future. Recency is negatively associated with generosity. However, as intentions increase, generosity increases as well. The positive effect of income means that higher income leads to larger total gifts. In general, the analysis thus confirms the importance of the traditional predictor sets. The inclusion of empathic concern and personal distress in the last step explains significantly more variance in total donations; the coefficient estimates further reveal negative effects of personality traits. The higher the empathy, the lower the size of total donations. Consequently, the results only support Hypothesis 2b; egoistically motivated donors are more likely to donate less money in response to direct mail campaigns. However, the same pattern marks altruistically motivated donors, which contradicts Hypothesis 2a.

Two issues demand further exploration: the added value of knowledge about empathy and the negative impact of empathic concern on generosity. First, though previous analyses demonstrate a significant improvement in the model with the inclusion of empathy measures, the contributions of empathic concern and personal distress seem relatively minimal, according to the hierarchical regression analysis. However, if past behavior mediates the effect of empathic concern or personal distress on charitable giving, the implications are much more powerful, especially for new donors, for whom no RFM information is available. If past behavior mediates the relationship between empathy and charitable giving, collecting information about a person's empathic concern and personal distress is much more relevant. The next section reports the results of a pertinent mediation analysis.

Second, the negative effect of empathic concern on generosity in the hierarchical regression analysis is surprising. However, the analysis only includes generosity toward one charity, whereas of Bekkers (2006) considers total generosity. Therefore, the second large-scale data collection provides a means to investigate the relationship between empathy and generosity across all different charities. Empathic concern might have a negative effect on generosity toward one charity but demonstrate a positive relationship with total generosity.

[Table 2 here.]

4.2. Study 1: Mediators of the relationship between empathy and donation behavior

Separate analyses entail each dependent measure (i.e., decision to donate versus generosity), empathic dimension (i.e., empathic concern versus personal distress), and potential mediator (i.e., recency, frequency and monetary value). The measure of the overall significance of the indirect effect (i.e., path through the mediator) uses a bootstrapping mediation test (Preacher and Hayes, 2004; Shrout and Bolger, 2002; Zhao, Lynch, and Chen, 2010). Two mediators emerge for the impact of the empathic dimensions on donation behavior: recency mediates the relationship between empathic concern and donation behavior,

and monetary value mediates the relationship between personal distress and donation behavior. Frequency is not a mediator in this context.

Figure 3 represents the mediation analysis related to the decision to donate. In relation to this binary dependent measure, the direct path between empathic concern and the donation decision (b(YX) = .16, *p* < .10) and the direct path between personal distress and the donation decision (b(YX) = .13, *p* < .10) are both positive and marginally significant. Empathic concern increases the number of days since the last donation to a charity (b(MX) = 8.55, *p* < .10), which decreases the likelihood to donate (b(YM.X) = -.004, *p* < .001). The bootstrap estimate of this indirect effect (effect value = -.03) and the constructed 95% confidence interval (lower bound 95% CI = -.070, upper bound 95% CI = -.0001), based on 5,000 replications, show that 0 is not in the 95% confidence interval, so this negative indirect effect is significant. In addition, personal distress reduces monetary value (b(MX) = -.06, *p* < .05), which increases the likelihood to donate (b(YM.X) = .67, *p* < .001). The bootstrap estimate of this indirect effect (effect value = -.04) and the constructed 95% confidence interval (lower bound 95% CI = -.083, upper bound 95% CI = -.006), based on 5,000 replications, show that 0 is not in the 95% confidence interval; therefore, this negative indirect effect is significant. After controlling for the mediator, the direct paths between empathic concern and the donation decision (b(YX.M) = .22, *p* < .05) and between personal distress and the donation decision (b(YX.M) = .18, *p* < .05) are positive and significant, which suggests partial mediation. Because the direct and indirect paths have opposite signs, competitive mediation emerges, suggesting the existence of other mediators that might explain a positive indirect path (Zhao et al., 2010).

[Figure 3 here.]

Figure 4 represents the mediation analysis related to the generosity. Related to this dependent measure, the direct paths between empathic concern and generosity (b(YX) = -.06,

$p < .10$) and between personal distress and generosity (b(YX) = -.11, $p < .001$) are negative. In line with the decision to donate, the same mediators exist in these relationships. For empathic concern, the effect on recency is positive (b(MX) = 11.5, $p < .05$), and the effect of recency on generosity, controlling for empathic concern, is negative (b(YM.X) = -.002, $p < .001$). The bootstrapped estimate of the indirect effect of empathic concern on generosity through recency is -.04, and the true estimated indirect effect lies between -.08 and -.01, with 95% confidence. Because 0 is not in the 95% confidence interval, the indirect effect is significantly different from 0 at $p < .05$. For personal distress, the effect on monetary value is negative (b(MX) = -.08, $p < .05$), and the effect of the mediator on generosity, controlling for personal distress, is positive (b(YM.X) = .69, $p < .001$). The bootstrapped estimate of the indirect effect (effect value= -.05) and the constructed 95% confidence interval (lower bound 95% CI = -.09, upper bound 95% CI = -.01), based on 5,000 replications, show that 0 is not in the 95% confidence interval, so this negative indirect effect is also significant. In contrast with the positive direct effects of empathy on the decision to donate, after controlling for the mediator, the direct path between empathic concern and generosity (b(YX.M) = -.04, $p > .10$) is not significant, suggesting full mediation. The direct path between personal distress and generosity (b(YX.M) = -.06, $p < .001$) is negative and significant, indicating partial mediation. The equal signs of the indirect and direct paths imply complementary mediation, so other mediators might explain the negative indirect path.

[Figure 4 here.]

4.3. *Study 2: The role of generosity across multiple charities*

While the first study only investigates generosity toward one charity based on real donation behavior, the second data collection considers donation behavior across multiple charities based on self-report information. The aim of this second study is to explain an unexpected result; empathic concern might have a negative effect on generosity toward one

charity but a positive relationship with total generosity. In other words, more empathically concerned, and thus altruistically motivated, donors want to reduce the distress of others by increasing their welfare through donating. These other-oriented people might be more sensitive to different initiatives, resulting in relatively smaller donations for each charity because they need to divide their money. However, the donations to different charities may mean the total generosity of highly empathically concerned people is higher. That is, empathic concern may drive donations to multiple charities. This second study therefore investigates whether a positive relationship exists between multi-charity donations and empathic concern and if this relationship is absent for personal distress. The authors expect a positive relationship between empathic concern and total generosity, as well as a negative relationship between personal distress and total generosity.

With a focus on generosity conditional on donating, the analysis only includes donors in 2008 (N = 1,381). As expected, the significant positive relationship between empathic concern and breadth (r = .24, *p* < .001) indicates that donors with higher empathic concern are more likely to give to more different initiatives. This relationship between empathic concern and multi-charity donations may explain the negative relationship between empathic concern and generosity to one charity. Summing total donations in 2008 across all charities clarifies the relationship between empathic concern and total generosity. As predicted, the analysis reveals a significant positive relationship between empathic concern and total generosity (r = .20, *p* < .001). This positive relationship accords with previous research and is consistent with Hypothesis 2a. Looking only at generosity toward one charity misses the complete picture.

For personal distress, as expected, no significant relationship (*p* > .10) between personal distress and multi-charity donations emerges. As in the first study, the negative relationship (r = -.116, *p* < .01) between personal distress and total generosity indicates that people with

egoistic motivations for donating are generally less generous. Again, this finding supports Hypothesis 2b. The small donation helps repair the negative mood, addressed to the person him- or herself.

5. General discussion

5.1. Conclusion

Past behavior, intentions, sociodemographics, and psychological measures of empathy are all important for predicting charitable giving. This study confirms previous findings regarding traditional predictor sets for monetary donations but also demonstrates the added value of important psychological measures, namely, empathic concern and personal distress, beyond traditional independent measures. This study also features a large-scale data set that reflects real donation behavior, gathered from the database of the charity, instead of just donation intentions, which represent the conventional data in prior research.

Both emotional dimensions of empathy have differential influences on donation decisions and generosity toward the charity of interest. First, empathic concern positively affects the donation decision, which makes sense because donors with high levels of empathic concern focus on alleviating the suffering of unfortunate others, such as by making a donation. However, personal distress does not influence the decision to donate. An explanantion might be that, in the context of this study, the ease of escape may be relatively higher than what was assumed. Second, both measures of empathy negatively affect the donor's generosity toward the individual charity. For empathic concern, this unexpected result prompted a second study, which revealed that donors with high empathic concern donate to multiple different charities and comply with the donation requests of diverse charities. These donors appear rather other oriented and feel compassionate toward others, which makes them more sensitive to different initiatives but leaves relatively smaller donations for each charity. Empathic concern is thus an important driver of donations to multiple charities. Third, in a related result, studying

generosity toward only one charity produces incorrect interpretations; in donations across all charities, people high on empathic concern are more generous. People high on personal distress instead are less generous toward both a single and all charities together. These egoistically motivated, self-oriented donors focus on repairing their negative mood, which may explain this negative effect, because merely making a contribution, even a small one, satisfies their main motivation. Personal distress is not related to the breadth of the donor. This study demonstrates both similarities and dissimilarities in the two measures of empathy.

5.2. The value of knowledge about empathy

The improvement in both models after including measures of empathy is rather weak, though significant. Past behavior, easily available in the charity's database, is a very good indicator for future behavior, and past behavior mediates the relationship between empathy and charitable giving. Therefore, knowledge about empathy should have particular relevance for prospective donors, who have no past behavior data. In addition, recency mediates the relationship between empathic concern and charitable giving. The positive path between empathic concern and recency might seem surprising, though the analysis only includes recency toward one charity. As the authors show that people high on empathic concern are multiple donors, further research might take into account past behavior toward all potential charities instead of only one. The negative path between personal distress and monetary value is more obvious and in line with the self-oriented, egoistic helping behavior demonstrated by people high on personal distress.

5.3. Limitations and further research

Although this study provides important insights into charitable giving in response to donation requests through direct mail fundraising, several shortcomings arise that suggest opportunities for further research. First, for practical reasons and budgetary considerations, the charity sent the survey with a solicitation letter asking for a donation. For this reason,

there is a potential bias as a result of including the survey in a donation solicitation. In addition, the survey item pertaining to intentions spanned a rather long period of 10 months, which may lower the predictability of intentions for donation behavior at the end of the period. Both issues may influence the results. Second, this study focuses on direct mail campaigns to previous donors. Further research should validate the findings in an acquisition context by considering prospective donors and investigate whether the findings for empathic concern and personal distress hold for acquisition campaigns targeted at people who never contributed before. Third, in searching for additional mediators, researchers should focus on those that would produce a positive indirect path between empathy and the donation decision. Fourth, the present study does not identify how much the small increase in predicting donation behavior gained by including measures of empathy is worth compared to the cost of obtaining information on these characteristics for potential donors. Further research needs to clarify this issue. Fifth, another research opportunity would take into account past behavior toward all potential charities instead of only one. Sixth and finally, though this study shows the added value of personality measures for predicting charitable giving, research could incorporate other personality traits and perceptions (e.g., Sargeant, Ford and West, 2006).

5.4. Managerial implications

These findings offer practical implications for fundraisers that want to improve their direct mail marketing strategy. From a managerial point of view, charities' databases provide a crucial source of information for predicting charitable giving. Active donors' past behavior gives an excellent indicator of their future behavior. Charities might augment these data with information about sociodemographics and psychological measures to improve their predictions of donation behavior. Regarding measures of empathy, address providers should collect information about empathic concern and personal distress. If a direct mail address provider sells a list of prospects to a charity, that provider should include personality

information to ensure a more effective household list. Taking personality characteristics into account when targeting potential donors would be a good strategy for charities. However, the distinction between the decision to donate and the donation amount is crucial. People with empathic concern are more likely to donate in the next period, but they might not be more generous toward the charity of interest. Specifically, people with high empathic concern or high personal distress are more likely to respond to charitable direct mails. However, if charities want to maximize the size of the donation, they should target donors with lower empathic concern or personal distress scores.

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Table 1: Hierarchical regression results for decision to donate

Variable	Exp(B)	B	S.E.
Frequency	1.36***	0.31	0.04
Step 1 Δ-2LL	79.76***		
Recency	1.00***	-0.002	0.00
Step 2 Δ-2LL	129.24***		
Intentions	1.11	0.11	0.07
Step 3 Δ-2LL	3.97*		
Age	1.02***	0.02	0.01
Step 4 Δ-2LL	14.18***		
Empathic concern	1.28*	0.25	0.10
Personal distress	1.09	0.09	0.08
Step 5 Δ-2LL	7.82*		
Model -2LL	905.14		
Constant	0.05***	-3.07	0.81
Nagelkerke R^2	.28		
N	1385		

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 2: Hierarchical regression results for generosity

Variable	β	b	S.E.
Monetary value	0.74***	0.67	0.02
Step 1 ΔR^2	.592***		
Recency	-0.05*	0.00	0.00
Step 2 ΔR^2	.002*		
Intentions	0.05**	0.04	0.01
Step 3 ΔR^2	.003**		
Income	0.04*	0.03	0.01
Step 4 ΔR^2	.002**		
Empathic concern	-0.05**	-0.06	0.02
Personal distress	-0.06**	-0.05	0.02
Step 5 ΔR^2	.005***		
Model F	300.31***		
Constant		1.06	0.17
Adjusted R^2	.60		
N	1186		

*$p < .05$.

**$p < .01$.

***$p < .001$.
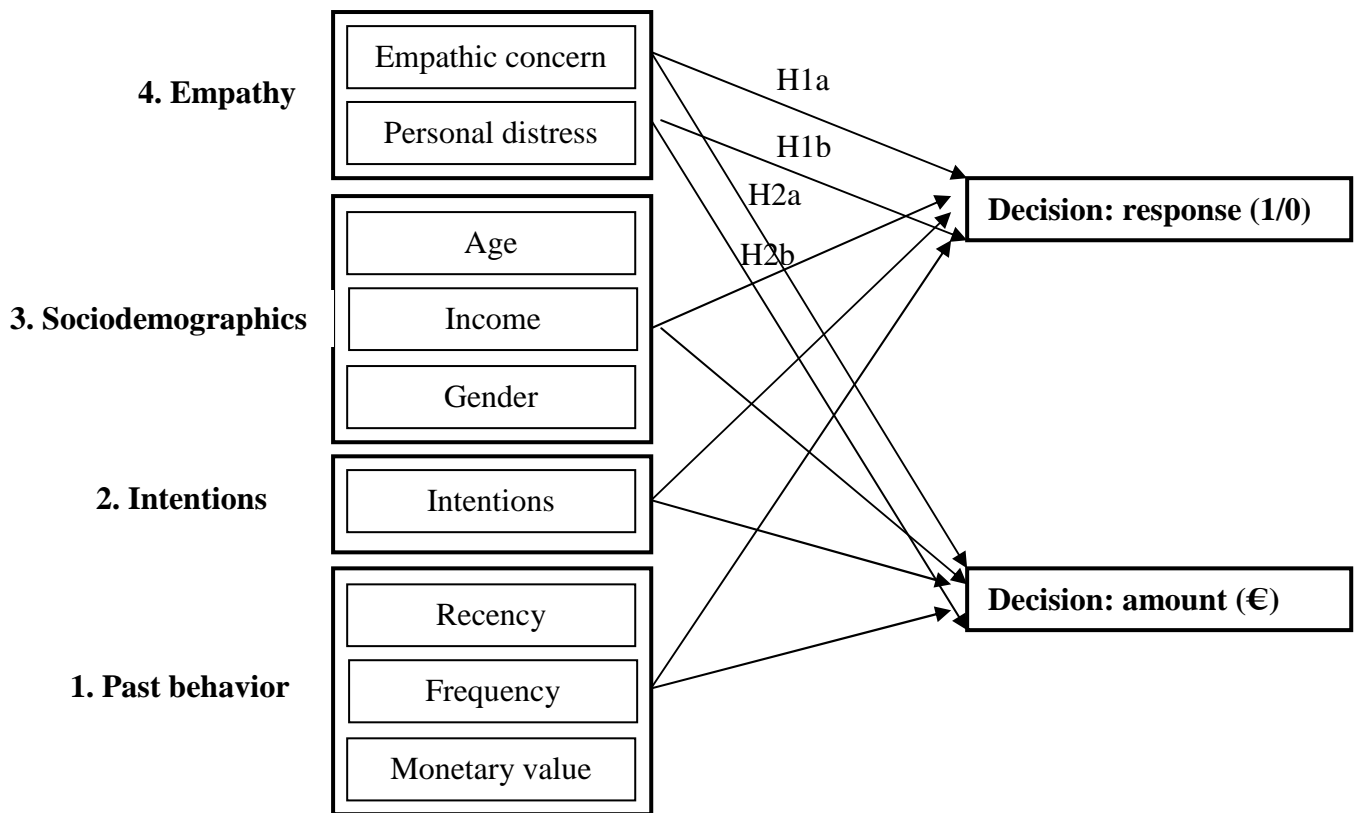
Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Figure 2: Time window study 1
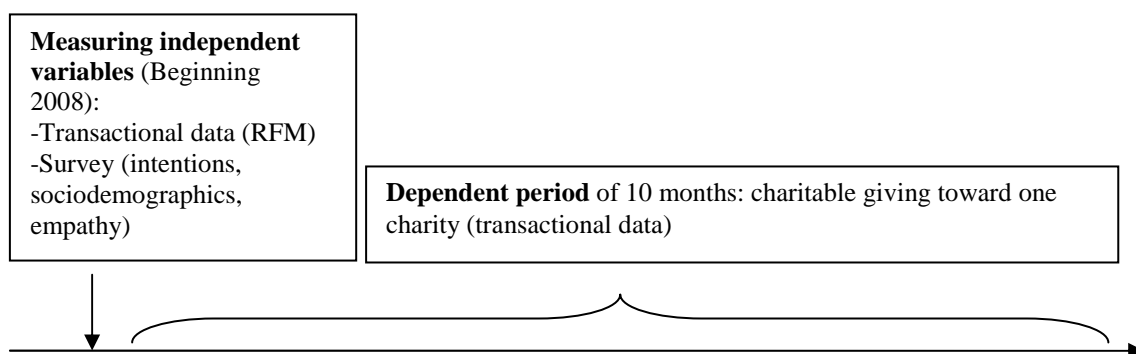
Figure 3: Mediation analysis related to the decision to donate

Empathic Concern	**Personal distress**
REC + ↗ ↘ - EC → 1/0 (+)	MON - ↗ ↘ + PD → 1/0 (+)
EC → 1/0 (+)	PD → 1/0 (+)
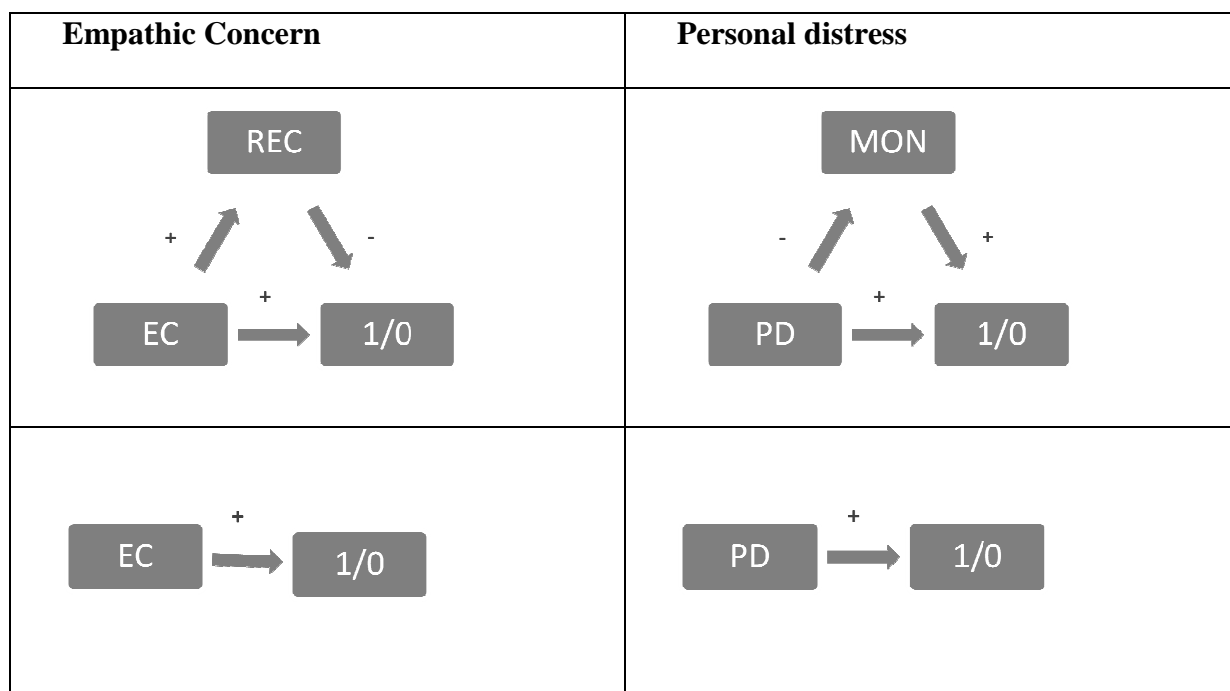
Figure 4: Mediation analysis related to generosity

Empathic Concern	**Personal distress**
REC + ↗ ↘ - EC €	MON - ↗ ↘ + PD → € (-)
EC → € (-)	PD → € (-)
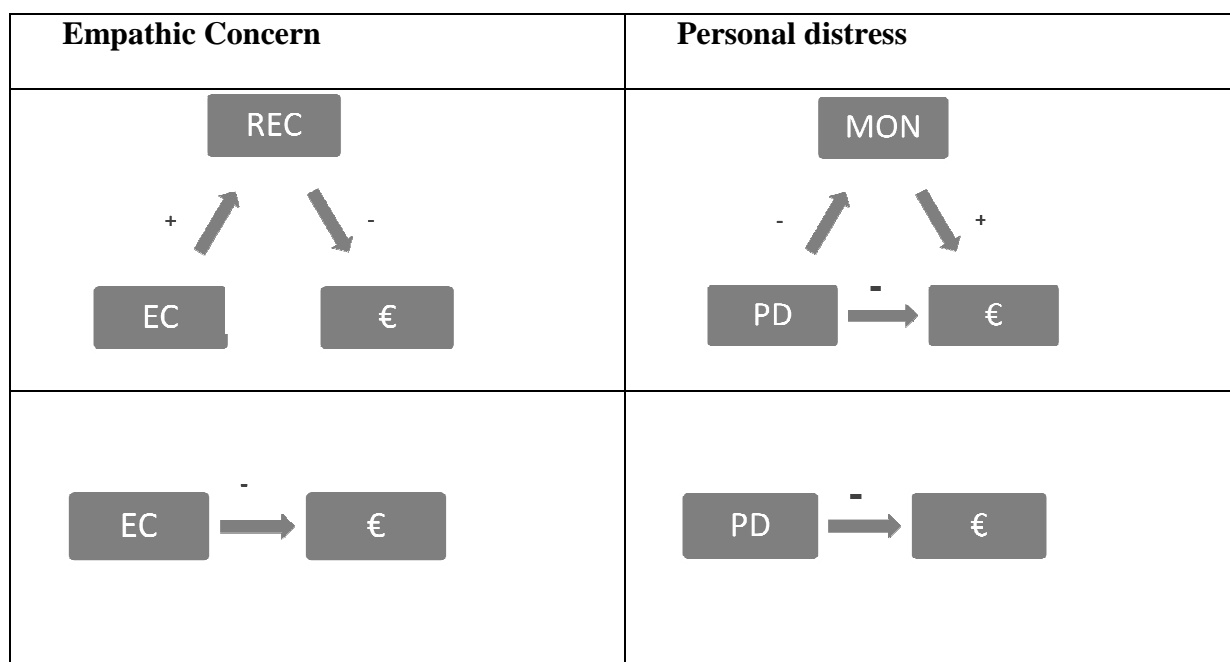
Appendix

Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983a)

The following statements inquire about your thoughts and feelings in a variety of situations. For each item, indicate how well it describes you by choosing the appropriate letter on the scale at the top of the page: A, B, C, D, or E. When you have decided on your answer, fill in the letter next to the item number. READ EACH ITEM CAREFULLY BEFORE RESPONDING. Answer as honestly as you can. Thank you.

ANSWER SCALE: A = does not describe me very well, E = describes me very well.

1. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me. (EC)

2. Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems. (EC) (-)

3. In emergency situations, I feel apprehensive and ill-at-ease. (PD)

4. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective toward them. (EC)

5. I sometimes feel helpless when I am in the middle of a very emotional situation. (PD)

6. When I see someone get hurt, I tend to remain calm. (PD) (-)

7. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal. (EC) (-)

8. Being in a tense emotional situation scares me. (PD)

9. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them. (EC) (-)

10. I am usually pretty effective in dealing with emergencies. (PD) (-)

11. I am often quite touched by things that I see happen. (EC)

12. I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person. (EC)

13. I tend to lose control during emergencies. (PD)

14. When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces. (PD)

Notes: (-) denotes reverse-scored item. EC = empathic concern scale, PD = personal distress scale.