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## Exploring Singaporean Giving Behaviour to Different Charitable Causes

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### ABSTRACT

In spite of increasing interest in the area of charitable giving, the difference between donors and potential donors across different charitable causes is unclear. Moreover, the disparity experienced in donation behaviour for charitable causes in the growing Singaporean non-profit sector suggests that a need exists to advance knowledge in the field. Doing so will go some way towards contributing to the overall progress of the sector and offer insights that may be transferable elsewhere. This paper reveals several factors (empathy, individualistic orientation, and past donation behaviour) that differentiate donors and potential donors to three charitable causes in Singapore: animal welfare, counselling and family services, and cancer care. Further, age and religion are revealed as moderators of the relationship between the above factors and inclination to donate to the three mentioned causes.

### ARTICLE

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#### Introduction

In terms of giving behaviour, the primary focus has been the non-profit sector in the United States and the United Kingdom. Giving behaviour knowledge for other countries is thus lacking, presenting an opportunity for further research, particularly in a more eastern context. Wide disparities in the incomes of charities support the idea that donors display preferential giving behaviours. Such preferential giving behaviour is also evident in the Singaporean context. Those charities with incomes greater than \$10 million comprise only 6% of the total number of charitable institutions, yet account for almost 85% of the \$9.02 billion charity income stream (Charity portal, 2010). As an infant sector, disparity in support can be detrimental to the needs the sector seeks to address. Consequently, understanding what underlies disparity in support would be useful.

#### Literature

Personal values are presented in the literature as key predictors of various forms of charitable behaviour. For instance, values are shown to affect the charitable behaviours of human organ donation, gift giving, volunteerism, blood donation, and giving to charitable causes. In the case of the latter, Bennett (2003) reveals the personal tendencies of empathy, individualistic orientation, and materialism to be useful differentiating predictors of giving to selected charity genre in the UK. Similarly, Wymer (1997) found differences in the personal values and aforementioned tendency of empathy, as well as self-esteem, for volunteers to various charitable causes.

Research into why certain individuals choose to give to specific cause types has not only been scant, but lacks information about whether previous findings extend to other countries. This study addresses this gap by exploring the extent to which donors and potential donors differ in terms of their giving behaviour to three charitable causes in Singapore: animal welfare, cancer care, and counselling and family services. As a starting point, the same personal tendencies of empathy, materialism, and individualistic orientation explored by Bennett (2003) are considered.

Empathy corresponds to an altruistic motivation that is correlated to pro-social care behaviour. We consider empathy extends to animals since animal abuse is widely considered a moral issue supported by laws to ensure their protection. Consequently, we propose positive relationships exist between empathy and giving to both cancer care and animal welfare causes to a greater extent than to counseling and family services.

Individualistic orientation (IO) is the importance placed on acting in accord with personal interests and feelings, and is regarded as one of the basic orientations underlying behaviour and opinions. Individualists are deemed to be more sympathetic towards charities supporting freedom and independence for others. We suggest individuals with higher levels of IO are more likely to support both counselling and family services and cancer care over animal welfare, since discussion concerning animal welfare is often presented outside the domain of modernist (rationalism, individualism, and humanism) discourse and the moral agency consideration of self-benefit.

Choice in charitable giving is found to provide donors with opportunities for self-expression. We suspect materialistic individuals will donate to causes offering greater public recognition, such as high profile causes such as cancer care.

Once giving is stimulated, individuals are more likely to give to other causes. The issue investigated in this study is whether the act of having previously donated (in the past year) can predict the inclination of donors to donate to specific causes. Indeed, experience of having previously donated may indicate generosity rather than a preference to give to a specific cause. Thus, in seeking to identify predictors of giving behaviour, we suggest that factors such as empathy, materialism, and individualistic orientation (which shape behaviour) are likely to exert a stronger influence on donation preferences than general non-specific cause giving behaviour.

Some suggest that donors are more likely to give to the same charity on subsequent occasions. However, we were unable to locate evidence in the literature to suggest that this form of attachment and discrimination applies at the cause level. Without asserting any temporality, it is argued that choosing to donate to a particular cause indicates a form of preference toward that cause. Consequently, we suggest that past donation giving behaviour (PDC) to cancer care, animal welfare, and counselling and family services is likely to represent an important determinant of subsequent giving behaviour. To recap, the purpose of this study is to explore how well empathy, individualistic orientation, materialism, and general past donation behaviour explain future inclination to give to the three identified causes.

## **Research Design**

To explore the relationships between the discussed concepts and to maximise sample heterogeneity, a questionnaire was administered verbally to a convenience sample of 226 Singaporeans at several high foot-traffic locations in different parts of Singapore. All questionnaire items can be found in Table 1.

Table 1:

<b>Empathy - ‘1 (does not describe me well) to 7 (describes me well)’</b>
1. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me
2. Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems.
3. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them.
4. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal.
5. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them.
6. I am often quite touched by things that I see happen.
7. I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person.
<b>Materialism - ‘1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree)’</b>
1. I like owning things others do not have.
2. It is important to me to make a lot of money.
3. I like to own things that impress people.
4. My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.
<b>Individualistic orientation - ‘1 (definitely not true for me) to 7 (definitely true for me)’</b>
1. I avoid doing what I believe is wrong
2. I like to be myself
3. I experience no pressure to conform to social norms
4. I am my own person
5. My actions are based on my choices, not needs

## Conclusions

Significant relationships were found for all constructs with the exception of materialism. Clear positive relationships between past giving and future giving for each of the three causes were found, suggesting the importance of relationship building programs to reinforce donor loyalty. Furthermore, a clear positive relationship between giving to cancer care and counseling and family services was found. Indeed, a strong path between inclination to donate to cancer care and counseling and family services highlights the potential for collaboration and cross-promotion between these causes. We propose that the idea of cross-cause collaboration is worth exploring as both causes may be able to exploit synergies, thereby improving their overall performance by building on shared competencies. In addition, a clear negative association between past giving to animal welfare and cancer care was found. In terms of the three causes of animal welfare, cancer care, and counseling and family services, the pattern of donation giving behaviour revealed for cancer care and counseling and family services was uniquely different from that of animal welfare. This finding suggests the existence of two distinct donor groups across the three: those that give to animal welfare and those that give to both cancer care and counseling and family services. This finding reinforces the above suggestion that these causes explore the existence of opportunities for collaboration. Exploring the modeled relationships more deeply revealed moderator effects for age and religion but not for gender.

In terms of marketing implications, promotion in line with specific age and religion categories is possible. In terms of age with respect to cancer care, one approach would be to select and promote in media outlets that would be of interest to the < 25 and 25 – 34 years age groups. The appeal messaging in such media could be scripted around past giving to cancer care, and the meaning implied by empathy and individualistic orientation as defined in this study. This would no doubt require careful innovative design, whether in print, online, or as a combination of the two.

For counseling and family services, a strong path between cancer care and this cause exists across all age groups, but specifically for the <25 years group, suggesting that a cancer care themed promotion targeted to all age categories but one geared particularly to the < 25 years segment could be considered. This may serve also to strengthen the somewhat weaker

relationship between historical giving and future inclinations to give to this cause evident across all age categories, but particularly to the 35 years plus and < 25 years age groups.

Further, significant paths between past donation behaviour and future inclinations to donate to counseling and family services exists across the two younger age categories (narrowly non significant for 35 years plus). However, these relationships are not particularly strong, highlighting the need for ongoing promotion and relationship development to build and reinforce the loyalty of these groups. Similarly, moderate to strong relationships are evident between past and future inclinations to donate to animal welfare services across all age categories and, consequently, appeals designed to reinforce the benefits of supporting this cause would serve to enhance loyalty at all age levels.

In terms of religion, the relationship between both empathy and individualistic orientation with cancer care is particularly prevalent for Buddhists, as indicated by the significant moderator effects. Alongside the <25 years age category, the moderator effect between these suggests a need for targeted promotion with an emphasis on empathy and individualistic orientation and through Buddhist outlets such as temples, book stores, and the communities in which these are located. Similarly for the Buddhist cohort, the existence of a moderator effect between past giving to counseling and family services and future inclination to give to this cause suggests the need to continually build on the relationship with this cohort.

Finally, with respect to the relationship between future inclination to donate to cancer care and counseling and family services, as with the <25 years age group discussed above for this same relationship, the Christian cohort also reveal a strong inclination to donate to counseling and family services, although this relationship is not at all dependent on past giving as evidenced by the non significant path between past giving and future inclinations to give to this cause. In fact, the directionality of the relationship as revealed following the analysis of various models would suggest that opportunities to build on promotion to cancer care exist. This could either be carried out in collaboration with, or by riding on the back of, cancer care promotion campaigns.

In terms of limitations, akin to other studies adopting a self-report approach, the possibility of social desirability having inflated responses reporting past donation history exists. To minimise this we highlighted to respondents the anonymity of all data gathered. Nonetheless, our results are still susceptible to social desirability bias and this should be borne in mind. Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of data gathered. We recommend that future studies would benefit from collecting longitudinal data and from the adoption of random selection techniques.

Finally, to capture insights beyond those presented in the extant literature, we focussed our study on a number of relatively poorly supported causes in the Singapore context. Given the paucity of research in the area, we suggest that future studies explore other cause 'genres' as well as the relationship to these of a more extensive set of personal values in combination rather than the few individually treated values included in this study. Clearly this would necessitate a much larger sample than the one adopted here. Finally, we suggest that such studies be implemented in other countries differentiated perhaps by culture, donation propensity, and the non-profit sector structure.

## References

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