Hide the light or let it shine? Examining the factors influencing the effect of publicizing donations on donors' happiness

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\textbf{A B S T R A C T}

Conflicting arguments exist for whether charities should publicize or ask donors to publicize their charitable contributions. The current research provides an initial examination of the psychological consequences when charities ask individual donors to publicize their own good deeds. Two studies show that when donors are required to publicize their donations, this action creates reputation benefits, which then cause individual donors to feel less happy and be less likely to help in the future, especially if they have a high (vs. low) moral identity. However, the negative influence of publicizing diminishes if the choice to publicize is optional rather than mandatory.

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\textbf{1. Introduction}

Charities often need to decide whether to publicize or ask donors to publicize their charitable contributions. Behavioral economists maintain that people seem to be more selfless and contribute more if their contributions are exposed to the public (e.g., Alpizar, Carlson, & Johansson-Steinman, 2008; Reinstein & Riener, 2012; Soetevent, 2005), suggesting that charities should reveal the identity of their donors or encourage donors to publicize their good deeds, to “let their light shine” (Andreon & Petrie, 2004). Yet, in practice, many charities allow anonymous giving and do not publicize any information about their donors (e.g., North Carolina Woodworker, 2009). For example, churches often encourage anonymous contributions (Hugh-Jones & Reinstein, 2012), and many fundraisers offer donors the option of checking a box such as “I prefer to make this donation anonymously” (e.g., ChildServe, 2012). Similarly, many donors choose to stay quiet about their actions. According to a compilation of donations of $1 million or more in a single year, unnamed donors pledged at least $77 donations of $1 million (about 19% of donations at this level), including 23 who gave more than $10 million and 4 who donated $100 million or more (Chronicle of Philanthropy, 2008). A recent survey of 24 donors revealed that two-thirds did not sense any need to tell others about their donations (Massey et al., 2010).

Therefore, a discrepancy remains between theory and practice. Should charities publicize or encourage donors to publicize their good deeds? It is not clear why some donors choose to hide their light. This research attempts to address these questions by examining the psychological consequences of publicizing individual donations. Individual donors, as a group, represent the largest source of donations to charities, accounting for 73% of total contributions (GivingUSA Foundation, 2010). Because of their critical role in generating funds for charities, it is important to investigate ways to ensure individual donors’ satisfaction. Although prior research has linked individual giving to reported happiness states (e.g., Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2008; Harbaugh, Mayr, & Burghart, 2007; Liu & Aaker, 2008), it has not addressed the likely psychological consequences of publicizing individual donations.

This study offers an initial examination of whether and how the happiness of individual donors is affected when charities ask them to publicize their donations. In one pilot study and two subsequent studies, we find that if donors are required to publicize their good deeds, they feel less happy and are less likely to help in the future; this effect is even stronger among donors with a high (vs. low) moral identity. However, this negative influence can be mitigated by making publicizing optional (vs. mandatory). The mechanism underlying this effect appears linked to the reputation benefits gained from publicizing. With these findings, this study advances understanding of the impact of publicizing on post-donation happiness, an important factor seldom
examined by prior research. It also offers charity managers practical implications for establishing optimal publicizing strategies.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Should donations go public?

Conflicting arguments exist for whether donations should be publicized. On the one hand, behavioral economists suggest that people act more generously and make larger donations when they are observed in social settings (e.g., Alpizar et al., 2008; Reinstein & Riener, 2012; Soetevent, 2005). Publicizing may encourage people to donate more to signal their generosity or improve their reputations (e.g., Harbaugh, 1998; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Milinski, Semmann, & Krambeck, 2002). In this case, making donations public should increase voluntary contributions; therefore, charities should clearly identify contributors and their contributions (e.g., Andreoni & Petrie, 2004; Rege & Telle, 2004).

On the other hand, anonymous giving can be a better choice in some conditions (e.g., Ariely, Bracha, & Meier, 2009). For example, Hugh-Jones and Reinstein (2012) point out that for certain type of donation participants, publicizing others’ donations will discourage their contribution. To be specific, there are two types of donation participants: conditionally cooperative “good” donors who prefer to contribute if they find others have helped and self-interested “bad” types who prefer not to contribute if they know others have contributed. When there are many bad types, information about donations lowers the total donation amount. Similarly, Jones and Linardi (2014) propose that some individuals are “wallflowers” who prefer to avoid appearing significantly better or worse than others when observed, so visibility will negatively affect their giving if wallflowers expect giving levels by others to be low. Moreover, Ariely et al. (2009) state that when donors are provided with a monetary incentive, anonymous donors contribute more than publicized donors.

However, another stream of research indicates that publicizing has no impact on donations in certain circumstances (e.g., Bracha, Heffetz, & Vesterlund, 2009; Bracha & Vesterlund, 2012). For example, Bracha and Vesterlund (2012) argue that when donation information is visible, people who read the information form two expectations of the donors: income (how much money the person has) and generosity (how much the person gives). In other words, if people give higher donations, it implies they are either rich or generous. Others then are more motivated to donate when they believe that the observed donations are mainly due to generosity, rather than higher incomes. However, when income distribution is heterogeneous and the exact income of the donors is unknown, people assume donors who provide higher donations earn higher incomes. This expectation diminishes the perceived generosity of donors who give higher donations and reduces the positive effects of visible donations.

These lines of research, which highlight the pros and cons of publicly acknowledging donors, can help charities optimize their fundraising. However, they largely ignore the potential psychological consequences of publicizing donations – the focus of this study.

2.2. Donations and intrinsic vs. extrinsic benefits

Helping behavior creates two types of benefits: intrinsic and extrinsic. On the one hand, a person derives satisfaction, a warm glow, and positive feelings from the experience of donating, which are benefits that are intrinsic to the act of donating (Andreoni, 1989, 1990; Johnson & Grimm, 2010). The link between helping behaviors and intrinsic benefits (e.g., happiness) is well established in prior research (Aknin, Barrington-Leigh, et al., 2013; Dunn et al., 2008; Liu & Aaker, 2008). Helping behaviors improve people’s happiness, especially when they promote social connections (Aknin, Dunn, Sandstrom, & Norton, 2013) or satisfies core human needs, such as relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2014). This relationship is robust across multiple research methods, including studies that use functional magnetic resonance imaging (Harbaugh et al., 2007), controlled experiments (Dunn et al., 2008), and cross-national comparisons (Aknin, Barrington-Leigh, et al., 2013).

On the other hand, helping behavior might be motivated by extrinsic motivations (Batson & Shaw, 1991; Cialdini et al., 1987). People can derive extrinsic benefits from the act of giving (Barna, Levine, Berman, & Small, 2014; Johnson & Grimm, 2010), whether tangible, such as monetary rewards (Ariely et al., 2009; Bénabou & Tirole, 2006; Gneezy & Rustichini, 2000), or intangible, such as an improved reputation (Harbaugh, 1998; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Milinski et al., 2002). Regardless of the form, these studies imply that a person who helps may gain some extrinsic rewards for doing so.

However, considerable evidence also suggests that extrinsic benefits, such as monetary rewards, can crowd out intrinsic benefits (e.g., Frey & Jegen, 2001; Frey & Oberholzer-Gee, 1997; Gneezy & Rustichini, 2000). That is, a person’s intrinsic interest in an activity may decrease if he or she also receives inducements to engage in that activity in return for an extrinsic reward (Lepper & Greene, 1973). When people are willing to help others, some of them want to do so from an intrinsic motivation; after money gets introduced, they begin to engage in cost–benefit analyses, which lead them to believe that small amounts of money are not sufficient to incentivize them to do the work they previously were willing to do for nothing (Anik, Aknin, Norton, & Dunn, 2009). Moreover, for an intrinsically motivated person, monetary rewards create self-doubt about his or her true motives for doing the good deed (Bénabou & Tirole, 2006; Gneezy & Rustichini, 2000). Because monetary incentives weaken the intrinsic motivation for a donation (Ariely et al., 2009), they decrease donors’ willingness to donate (Lacetera & Macis, 2010). Even a vague reminder of money may cause people to exhibit less helpful behaviors (Vois, Mead, & Goode, 2006).

Similarly, people sometimes receive other extrinsic benefits, such as reputation enhancements, when their donations are publicly known (e.g., Harbaugh, 1998; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Milinski et al., 2002). Prior research suggests that evidence of personal benefits (e.g., reputation benefits) leads to the discounting of prosocial behavior (Berman, Levine, Barash, & Small, 2015; Lin-Healy & Small, 2013; Newman & Cain, 2014). People may appear less moral or intrinsically motivated if they expect to receive a reputational benefit than if they have no such expectations (Barash et al., 2014). As a result, if donors are aware of others’ negative perceptions of reputation benefits, the happiness they gain from their donations may be affected by the reputation benefits they gain.

In addition, according to self-perception theory (Bem, 1967; Bem & McConnell, 1970), people learn about their internal states partially by inferring them from observations of their own behavior. The presence of prestige achieved from publicizing donations may lead donors to perceive that they provided the help only for the reward. Donors who gain such reputation benefits from publicizing might perceive their helping behaviors as less “pure,” leading them to feel some discomfort about their extrinsic (reputation) benefits. The reputation benefits obtained from publicizing also could create doubt about a person’s intrinsic motivations for performing good deeds and move those helping behaviors into a cost–benefit context that attenuates the intrinsic motivation. We therefore posit that publicizing donations can backfire and reduce donors’ happiness with their donations.

2.3. Moderating role of moral identity

According to prior research on moral behavior, moral identity is one of many potential identities that people can use as a basis for self-definition (e.g., Lee, Winterich, & Ross, 2014), which represents a person’s associative cognitive network of related moral traits (e.g., being kind), feelings (e.g., concern for others), and behaviors
(e.g., helping others; Aquino & Reed, 2002). Moral identity identity offers a particularly useful predictor of both prosocial and antisocial behaviors (e.g., Shao, Aquino, & Freeman, 2008; Winterich, Mittal, & Aquino, 2013; Winterich, Mittal, & Ross, 2009; Winterich, Zhang, & Mittal, 2012). Because helping is a moral behavior consistent with a moral identity, a moral identity theoretically should increase prosocial behavior (Aquino & Reed, 2002). People constantly engage in reinforcement monitoring and identity verification processes, in which they retrospectively review associations with their identity to ensure they are behaving consistently while enacting it (Reed, Forehand, Puntoni, & Warlop, 2012). Therefore, those who embrace a strong moral identity will actively work to maintain their self-concept and reinforce their identity (Reed, Aquino, & Levy, 2007).

As we have argued, when publicizing provides reputation benefits, it creates doubt about the donors’ intrinsic motivation. If the donors embrace a high moral identity, through an identity verification process, they are more likely to question their intrinsic motivation for engaging in helping behavior and may come to believe that their behavior is inconsistent with their identity, which then leads to decreased happiness. In contrast, donors with a low moral identity believe that they deserve the reputational benefits, so publicizing does not influence the happiness they derive from donating. Building on this theory, we posit that donors with relatively high versus low levels of moral identity react differently to their good deeds being publicized, such that the influence of publicizing should be greater among donors with relatively stronger moral identities.

In summary, we theorize that because donors receive reputation benefits from publicizing their good deeds, publicizing donations can reduce donors’ happiness, but this effect should be moderated by the donors’ moral identity, such that the negative effect of publicizing on happiness is more salient for donors with strong moral identities. We test these predictions with a series of studies. In a pilot study, we confirm the negative correlation between publicizing practices and donors’ happiness. Then in Study 1, we reveal the effect of publicizing on donors’ happiness and specify the moderating effect of moral identity, as well as the underlying mechanisms. We propose a solution to reduce the potential negative effect of publicizing in Study 2, namely, letting donors decide whether to publicize their helping behavior.

3. Pilot study

In the pilot study, we aimed to test the correlation between publicizing donations and post-donation satisfaction. We collected data from one of the largest Internet portals in China (www.qq.com), where we posted a link to our survey on the news page and the charity channel page. Qualified participants were those who had voluntarily donated (at least once) to a charity in the past year. Participants were granted a chance to win a prize after they finished the survey. The online survey remained active for a two-week period during September 2012, and a total of 567 valid participants clicked the survey link. Because we were interested in donors who made voluntary donations, we also asked respondents whether their donations were voluntary or mandatory, then eliminated 96 responses that indicated mandatory donations. The adjusted sample size was 471 (65.8% men, 43.9% below 30 years of age, 51.4% earned monthly income of more than ¥3,000).

These valid participants first indicated whether their donations were publicly known (e.g., “My donation experience was publicized,” “No one except my family ever knew about my donations”). Next, they noted their happiness with the donation on a 7-point scale (“How happy do you feel when you think about your donation?”). Some demographic questions (gender, age, income) were also included in the questionnaire.

The donations of approximately one-quarter (25.7%) of the respondents were not publicized. The other participants’ donations (74.3%) were publicized in some way (e.g., social networks, publicized by the charities). The results indicated significant differences in the level of happiness between these two groups ($t(469) = -2.00, p < .05$), such that people whose donations were not publicized were happier about their donations ($M = 5.82, SD = 1.27$) than those whose donations were publicized ($M = 5.54, SD = 1.33$).

The pilot study thus provides initial support for the assertion that people generally feel less happy if their donations are exposed to the public. However, it suffers from some limitations. First, because it demonstrates only the correlation between publicizing and happiness, it is unknown whether a solid causal relationship exists. Second, we propose that donors receive reputation benefits from publicizing their good deeds, which makes them reconceive of the donation as less “pure” and reduces their happiness. Yet some potential moderating factors, such as moral identity, may influence the relationship between publicizing donations and happiness. Therefore, both the underlying mechanism of the publicizing effect and the boundary conditions need further examination. Third, the pilot study tests the impact of publicizing on givers’ happiness, which naturally raises the question: How do donors react to their decreased happiness? Previous research indicates that prosocial spending increases happiness, which encourages prosocial spending (Aknin, Dunn, & Norton, 2012; Barasch et al., 2014). Thus, we need to examine whether publicizing donations also influences donors’ future prosocial behavioral intentions. To address these limitations, in the following study we establish a solid causal relationship in controlled experiments, demonstrate the underlying mechanism, and examine potential moderating factors. We also include donors’ future prosocial behavioral intentions, to delineate the consequences of publicizing.

4. Study 1

4.1. Method

This study used a 2 (moral identity: high vs. low) × 2 (publicizing: publicized vs. non-publicized) between-subjects design. One hundred twenty-two students (78.7% women) from a large public Chinese university participated, in exchange for a ¥20 payment.

The study consisted of several tasks. First, we manipulated moral identity with a handwriting study. Following Reed et al. (2007), in a priming task, we told participants the handwriting task was designed to “examine people’s handwriting styles.” They each received one piece of paper in an envelope, which displayed a 9 × 5 matrix of nine character traits, listed in each row in the first column. We directed participants to write (in their own handwriting) the nine traits across the remaining four columns, so that each participant wrote each trait four times. We randomly assigned participants to different conditions. In the high moral prime condition, the nine traits were drawn from Aquino and Reed’s (2002) moral identity instrument (e.g., caring, compassionate), whereas the nine words in the low moral prime condition were neutral in their valence (e.g., car, chair).

Second, following the pencil-and-paper task, we asked participants to recall the nine words in a computer exercise. Then, we asked them to “take a few minutes to think about each of these words, visualize a person in your mind that could be a friend or family member, and write a brief story about that person using at least one of these words in the box below.”

Third, we presented participants with a description of a charity that supports children’s education in rural China and asked them if they wanted to donate ¥5 from the payment they would earn from participating in the study to the charity. Twenty-three respondents were not willing to donate, so we dropped them from the analysis, leaving 99 participants in the sample. The remaining participants were randomly assigned to the publicized or non-publicized conditions. In the publicized condition, participants were required to write about their current donation experience and thoughts, with the understanding that the charity would publish the content they wrote in its bulletin. We asked participants in the non-publicized condition to instead review a list of
words referring to inanimate objects, such as “book,” “key,” and “house,” and instructed them to write about their related experiences using at least one of these words. In both conditions, we assured participants that they did not need to worry about spelling or grammar and could write about anything.

Finally, we asked participants to report their happiness on a 9-point scale (“After the experiment, how happy/how satisfied do you feel when you think about your donation?”; Krishna, 2011; α = .83). We further measured the reputation benefits with three items on a 9-point scale (e.g., “I got reputation benefits/others’ recognition/good impressions from my donation”; Harbaugh, 1998; Johnson & Grimm, 2010; α = .93). To test for possible task differences, we asked the participants to rate the task difficulty and effort expended to perform the task on a reverse, 9-point scale (e.g., “difficult to easy/to write,” “much effort/little effort”). We also included a manipulation check that asked participants to rate the extent to which they thought the donation was anonymous, on a 9-point scale (1 = totally public; 9 = totally anonymous).

In addition, we included self-altruism and envy measures to test for potential alternative explanations. Self-altruism is a key mechanism to explain helping behaviors (e.g., Batson & Shaw, 1991; Krishna, 2011), because selfish motivations reduce the altruism associated with a prosocial act and diminish the donor’s benevolent image (Berman et al., 2015; Lin-Healy & Small, 2012). We measured self-altruism with three 9-point items (“I think I am caring/helpful/willing to make a sacrifice in the donation”; Krishna, 2011; α = .88). Recognition of givers’ good deeds also could cause others to feel envy (Chan & Sengupta, 2013), which could make givers feel bad (Mosquera, Parrott, & Mendoza, 2010). Therefore, we measured envy with two 9-point items (“I think my donation is enviable/adorable”; Chan & Sengupta, 2013; Mosquera et al., 2010; α = .76).

We also measured future prosocial behavioral intentions, using two items and 9-point scales (“I would like to continue giving to the charity,” and “I would recommend that other people support the charity in the future”; O’Neil, 2007; α = .84). Participants completed demographic measures and indicated what they thought was the true purpose of the study. Following the experiment, we made donations to the charity on behalf of the respondents.

### 4.2 Results

Consistent with the intent of the publicizing manipulation, donors in the publicized condition (M = 6.84, SD = 2.29) perceived the donation as less anonymous than did those in non-publicized conditions (M = 7.66, SD = 1.30, t(97) = −2.20, p < .05). Word length did not differ significantly between publicized and non-publicized conditions (Mpublicized = 114.94, SD = 77.14; Mnon-publicized = 133.16, SD = 69.51; t(97) = −1.24, p = .22), nor were there any significant differences between the publicized and non-publicized conditions in terms of task difficulty or effort in performing the task (t(97) < 1.40, n.s.).

#### 4.2.1 Impact of publicizing on happiness

We analyzed the data using a 2 (moral identity: high vs. low) × 2 (publicizing: publicized vs. non-publicized) analysis of variance (ANOVA). The analysis revealed a significant main effect of publicizing (F(1, 95) = 4.40, p < .05). People whose donations were not publicized were happier (M = 7.02, SD = 1.17) than those whose donations were publicized (M = 6.53, SD = 1.20, t(97) = 2.06, p < .05). Although we found no significant main effect of moral identity (F(1, 95) = .21, p = .65), the interaction between moral identity and publicizing had a significant effect (F(1, 95) = 4.40, p < .05), as we depict in Fig. 1. Donors with a high moral identity (M = 6.30, SD = 1.25) felt less happy if their donations were publicized (M = 7.28, SD = 1.07, t(47) = −2.92, p < .01), whereas the happiness of donors with a low moral identity did not change significantly across the two conditions (Mpublicized = 6.69, SD = 1.15; Mnon-publicized = 6.67, SD = 1.23; t(48) = .07, p = .95).

#### 4.2.2 Mediating role of reputation benefits

We expect the effect of publicizing on happiness to be mediated by the reputation benefits from publicizing. We conducted a mediation analysis using a bootstrapping method (Hayes, 2012; 5,000 bootstrap samples; SPSS Macro PROCESS Model 14). Donors in the publicized condition (M = 4.29, SD = 2.19) obtained more reputation benefits from publicizing than those in the non-publicized condition (M = 3.09, SD = 1.67, t(97) = 3.08, p < .01). The indirect effect through reputation benefits was significant for high moral identity donors, with a point estimate of −.244, and the 95% confidence interval excluded zero (−.588 to −.051). In contrast, the 95% confidence interval included zero (−.326 to .163) for low moral identity donors. Thus, donors with a high moral identity gained reputation benefits from publicizing, which lowered their happiness.

#### 4.2.3 Alternative explanations

To determine if other variables, such as self-altruism or envy, might also explain the negative effect of publicizing on donors’ happiness, we adopted a bootstrapping method and examined whether the moderating effect of moral identity was mediated by these two factors (Hayes, 2012; 5,000 bootstrap samples; SPSS Macro PROCESS Model 7). People in the publicized conditions expressed less envy concerns (M = 1.97, SD = 1.13) than those in non-publicized conditions (M = 2.63, SD = 1.35, t(97) = −2.42, p < .05). Regarding the indirect effect of envy, the 95% confidence interval included zero for both high (−.256 to .031) and low (−.271 to .048) moral identity donors. Thus, envy did not offer a viable alternative explanation.

Self-altruism also was not significantly different between the publicized and non-publicized conditions (Mpublicized = 5.65, SD = 1.61; Mnon-publicized = 6.15, SD = 1.60, t(97) = −1.57, p = .12). Regarding its indirect effect, the 95% confidence interval included zero for both high (−.290 to .036) and low (−.177 to .031) moral identity groups.

The non-significant mediating effect of self-altruism might arise because self-reported altruism, by its very nature, is chronic, and people generally view themselves in a positive light (Brown, 1986; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). Thus, a subtle manipulation like the one in this study is unlikely to induce a significant change in self-reported self-altruism. Overall though, self-altruism did not serve as a viable alternative explanation for the results of this study.

#### 4.2.4 Effects of publicizing on future prosocial behavioral intentions

The interaction effect of moral identity and publicizing on future prosocial behavioral intentions was significant (F(1, 95) = 4.65, p < .05), but none of the main effects were significant (F(1, 95) < 1.00, n.s.). Specifically, donors with a high moral identity were less willing to help in the future if their donations were publicized (M = 5.10,
SD = 1.48) than not publicized (M = 6.24, SD = 1.37; t(47) = −2.78, p < .01). The future prosocial behavioral intentions of donors with a low moral identity did not change significantly across two conditions (MPublicized = 5.78, SD = 2.04; MNon-publicized = 5.36, SD = 2.10; t(48) = .71, p = .48).

The mediation analysis (Hayes, 2012; 5,000 bootstrap samples; SPSS Macro PROCESS Model 7) indicated that the indirect effect of publicizing on the future prosocial behavioral intentions of donors with a high moral identity, through happiness, was also significant, with a point estimate of −.535. The 95% confidence interval excluded zero (−.1.134 to −.157). For low moral identifiers in contrast, the 95% confidence interval included zero (−.345 to .438). Therefore, only donors with high moral identities suffered less happiness if their donations were publicized, which reduced their future prosocial behavioral intentions.

4.3. Discussion

In summary, Study 1 illustrates the negative influence of publicizing on donors’ happiness, demonstrating that donors with a high moral identity feel less happy and are less likely to engage in future prosocial behavior if their donations are publicly known. However, publicizing does not affect the happiness and future prosocial behavior intentions of donors with a low moral identity. Moreover, reputation benefits can explain the effects of publicizing: Donors with a high moral identity earn reputation benefits from publicizing, which raises questions about their intrinsic motivations and decreases the happiness they derive from their donations.

However, considering the difficulty associated with identifying the level of moral identity of donors in practice, what tactics might be available to reduce the potential negative influence of publicizing? Setting a proper publicity policy might help. Some charities always publicize donors’ donating behaviors (as in Study 1), but in practice, others offer their donors the choice of being publicized or remaining anonymous. In line with the logic of Study 1, if they have the choice, donors with a high moral identity may not want to publicize their good deeds, because the possible reputation benefits may raise questions about their intrinsic motivations. In contrast, donors with a low moral identity may be more likely to publicize their donations, because they think they deserve the reputation benefits. Assuming that moral identity influences donors’ publicizing decisions and that the negative influence of publicizing on satisfaction exists only for high moral identity donors, there is reason to believe that optional publicizing can reduce the negative influence of publicizing. Therefore, we examine the moderating effect of volition in Study 2.

Furthermore, in Study 1, we manipulated the publicized (vs. non-publicized) condition by asking participants to write about their donation experience and thoughts (vs. related experience with inanimate objects). Writing about the good deeds may involve multiple, simultaneous processes (e.g., retrospective experiences, publicizing good deeds), so the writing process could interact with the manipulation of publicizing and influence the resulting effect. In Study 2, we therefore directly manipulate publicizing, by asking the donors simply to sign their names.

5. Study 2

As discussed, the purpose of this study was to examine whether the negative effect of publicizing decreases when charities give donors the option to publicize their helping behavior (vs. mandatorily publicizing).

5.1. Method

The study used a 2 (volition: optional vs. mandatory) × 2 (publicizing: publicized vs. non-publicized) between-subjects design. Participants were adults recruited from an online panel, who were entered into a lottery to win ¥50 cash. In total, 300 respondents participated in the experiment (49.0% women; average age 33.8; 63.0% earned monthly income of more than ¥5,000). Data from 13 respondents were incomplete, leaving us with 287 valid responses.

During the experiment, participants first read a one-page description of a charity that supported children’s education in rural China. They were told that a random drawing was to be conducted, in which they would have a 20% chance of winning ¥50, and were asked if they would like to donate ¥10 to the charity if they won. Most participants agreed to donate (only 25 refused); we analyzed the sample of those who were willing to donate (262 participants). After the experiment, we donated to the charity on behalf of the respondents.

The participants who agreed to donate were randomly assigned to the optional or mandatory conditions. In the optional condition, participants were asked if they would like to sign their name so that the charity could publish their donation information in its bulletin. In total, 85 participants chose to publicize their information, whereas 58 participants remained anonymous. In the mandatory condition, participants were randomly assigned to the publicized or non-publicized condition. Participants in the publicized condition were asked to sign their names; participants in the non-publicized condition were not required to do so.

In the next step, participants reported their happiness (α = .92) and reputation benefits (α = .92), and answered the manipulation check question. We also measured participants’ future prosocial behavior intentions with a new item on a 9-point scale: “Would you like to donate the rest of your money to other children in need?” Finally, we asked participants to guess the true purpose of the study and to answer some demographic questions.

5.2. Results

Donors in the publicized condition (M = 5.19, SD = 2.34) believed that the donation was less anonymous than those in the non-publicized condition (M = 7.53, SD = 1.65, t(260) = −9.19, p < .01).

5.2.1. Impact of publicizing on happiness

We conducted a 2 (volition: optional vs. mandatory) × 2 (publicizing: publicized vs. non-publicized) ANOVA on donors’ happiness ratings to examine whether volition moderates the negative effect of publicizing. The results revealed a significant main effect of volition (F(1,258) = 4.29, p < .05): donors felt happier in the optional (vs. mandatory) condition (Moptional = 7.84, SD = 1.11, Mmandatory = 7.49, SD = 1.45, t(260) = 2.21, p < .05). More important, the interaction effect was significant (F(1,258) = 6.47, p < .05) (Fig. 2). In the mandatory condition, donors felt less happy if their donations were publicized (vs. non-publicized) (Mpublicized = 7.23, SD = 1.52, Mnon-publicized = 7.73, SD = 1.32, t(117) = −1.91, p < .05). However, the difference in the levels of happiness between publicized and non-publicized respondents was
not significant in the optional condition \( (M_{\text{publicized}} = 7.96, SD = 1.11, M_{\text{non-publicized}} = 7.66, SD = 1.10, t(141) = 1.62, p = .11). \)

5.2.2. Mediating role of reputation benefits

We followed our Study 1 procedure (mediation analysis) to examine the indirect effect of reputation benefits. As expected, donors in the publicized condition \( (M = 6.51, SD = 1.80) \) obtained more reputation benefits from publicizing than those in the non-publicized condition \( (M = 5.01, SD = 2.23, t(260) = 6.04, p < .01). \) In the mandatory condition, the indirect effect through reputation benefits was negatively significant, with a point estimate of \(-2.06\), and the 95% confidence interval excluded zero \((-4.41 \text{ to } -0.47\)). In the optional condition, the indirect effect through reputation benefits was positively significant, with a point estimate of \(2.50\), and the 95% confidence interval excluded zero \((-1.09 \text{ to } 4.33).\) Donors gained more reputation benefits from publicizing, which lowered their post-donation happiness in the mandatory condition. However, the reputation benefits from publicizing increased donors’ happiness if donors had the choice to publicize or remain anonymous. It might be that in the optional condition, donors chose to publicize their good deeds to accumulate reputation benefits, so they felt happy about the reputation benefits they gained.

5.2.3. Effects of publicizing on future prosocial behavioral intentions

The interaction effect of volition and publicizing on future prosocial behavioral intentions was significant \( (F(1, 258) = 4.36, p < .05), \) but none of the main effects were significant \( (F(1, 258) = 1.74, \text{n.s.}). \) In the mandatory condition, donors were less willing to help others if their donations were publicized \( (M = 7.02, SD = 1.87) \) rather than not publicized \( (M = 7.72, SD = 1.36, t(117) = -2.36, p < .05). \) In the optional condition, the future prosocial behavioral intentions of donors did not change significantly across the two conditions \( (M_{\text{publicized}} = 7.18, SD = 1.70, M_{\text{non-publicized}} = 7.02, SD = 1.64, t(141) = .56, p = .58). \)

The mediation analysis indicated that the indirect effect of publicizing on future prosocial behavioral intentions, through happiness, was significant in the mandatory condition, with a point estimate of \(-2.64, \text{ and the 95% confidence interval excluded zero } (-6.22 \text{ to } -0.02). \) In the optional condition, the 95% confidence interval included zero \((-0.031 \text{ to } .408). \) Therefore, because of the reputation benefits, if a charity publicizes donors’ helping behavior mandatorily, donors’ happiness and future prosocial behavior intentions both decrease.

5.3. Discussion

Study 2 empirically supports and extends the basic findings of Study 1. When publicizing is mandatory, the reputation benefits gained from publicizing cause donors to feel less happy and leave them less likely to help in the future. However, this negative effect can be mitigated if the charity offers their donors the choice to be publicized or remain anonymous.

6. General discussion

6.1. Contributions

With this research, we have examined whether and how asking individual donors to publicize their good deeds influences their post-donation happiness and prosocial behavioral intentions. We first establish the correlation between publicizing and happiness in a pilot survey. Then in Study 1, we demonstrate a decrease in both the happiness (from donating) and the future prosocial behavioral intentions of donors with a high (vs. low) moral identity, because they earn reputation benefits from publicizing. We further illustrate a possible solution to reduce the negative effect of publicizing, namely, an optional publicizing policy (Study 2).

Our research contributes to theoretical and practical disputes about whether and when donations should be publicized. Most prior research in this area has focused on the influence of publicizing on fundraising totals \( (Alpizar et al., 2008; Ariely et al., 2009; Bracha & Vesterlund, 2012) \) or on others’ perceptions of donors who publicize \( (Berman et al., 2015; Lin-Healy & Small, 2013; Newman & Cain, 2014). \) Our research instead addresses the impact of publicizing on donors’ post-donation happiness. Although some evidence suggests that people act more generously and donate more when they are observed (mostly passively) in social settings \( (e.g., \ Alpizar et al., 2008; Reinstein & Rienek, 2012; Soetevent, 2005), \) we find that when the method of publicizing changes \( (e.g., charities require donors to publicize their helping behavior), publicizing may harm donors’ post-donation happiness and future prosocial behavioral intentions. By illustrating the potential negative effect of publicizing and some key boundary factors \( (e.g., moral identity, volition), \) we shed light on the impact of publicizing good deeds.

In addition, this research offers implications related to extrinsic benefits \( (e.g., reputation) and their effects on prosocial behavior. On the one hand, reputations earned from donating may encourage givers to donate more \( (e.g., Harbaugh, 1998; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Milinski et al., 2002). \) On the other hand, reputation benefits, as one kind of extrinsic benefits gained from publicizing, may be viewed as less moral \( (Barash et al., 2014). \) We go a step further to show that when donors with a high moral identity publicize their behaviors, the resulting reputation benefits hinder their intrinsic incentives, which decreases their post-donation happiness and future charitable donations. These results extend previous research on the role of incentives in prosocial behavior: When monetary rewards crowd out intrinsic motivation \( (e.g., Bénabou & Tirole, 2006; Frey & Oberholzer-Gee, 1997; Gneezy & Rustichini, 2000), \) the reputation benefits gained from publicizing have similar effects.

6.2. Implications for charitable giving

These findings offer important practical implications for charity managers. According to our study results, mandatory publicizing actually lowers donors’ happiness, especially for those who embrace a strong moral identity. In the long run, these moral donors are less likely to continue to give or to encourage others to support a charity if their good deeds have been publicized. Offering donors the option of being publicized or remaining anonymous weakens this negative influence of publicizing. Charity managers should take these influences into consideration when devising publicizing policies. Even if they choose to publicize helping behaviors for other reasons \( (e.g., as examples to encourage others’ giving), \) charities must develop more targeted strategies. If potential donors appear to exhibit more moral traits, the charity should not publicize their good deeds.

6.3. Limitations and directions for further research

We note several directions for further research. First, in addition to moral identity and volition, other factors, such as cultural differences, situational factors, and social connections between a donor and recipients, may moderate the relationship between publicizing and happiness. Compared with Western donors, Asian donors may be more likely to remain silent about their good deeds because of their cultural preferences \( (Nelson, Brunel, Supphellen, & Manchanda, 2006; Schug, Yuki, & Maddux, 2010). \) Situational factors \( (e.g., enthusiastic responses) could promote the benefits of a shared donation experience \( (e.g., Reis et al., 2010), \) which could alter the effects of publicizing. Social connections between a donor and recipients also might moderate the relationship between publicizing and happiness \( (Akinin, Dunn, et al., 2013). \) Publicizing alerts the recipient to the donor’s good deeds, which could enhance their closeness, make the donation more rewarding, and potentially increase the happiness of donors. But if the recipient suspects that the donor expects to earn reputation benefits from publicizing, the good deeds may be attributed as less moral \( (Barash et al., 2014) \) and potentially decrease happiness. How recipients attribute the donation, due to its publicizing, may constitute a key link with happiness.
Second, our research examines how being publicized by charities influences donors' happiness. However, Berman et al. (2015) demonstrate that when prosocial behavior is already known, bragging about good deeds signals a self-focused motivation that undermines attributions of generosity. Researchers should continue to investigate how various publicizing approaches interact to affect the psychological states of donors. Third, the current research provides some implications regarding the influence of extrinsic benefits (especially reputation benefits) on donors' prosocial behaviors, but donors also could acquire other kinds of extrinsic benefits, such as status (Bracha et al., 2009). Additional research should explore whether individual donors' status concerns influence the relationship between publicizing and happiness. We thus hope that our novel perspective on whether donations should be made public prompts additional research on donor satisfaction.

References


