



# Nonprofit brand image and typicality influences on charitable giving<sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This research examines the influence of nonprofit brand image and typicality on giving behaviors. To this end, the researchers create a scale to measure the brand image of charities. Four dimensions of nonprofit brands emerge in the new scale: usefulness, efficiency, affect and dynamism. Brand image explains up to 31% of intentions to give money and 24% of intentions to give time. The study also explores the role of typicality in giving behaviors. Typicality explains up to 29% of intentions to give money and 23% of intentions to give time. The theoretical contributions, in addition to the comprehensive scale, include the significant role that brand image and typicality play in affecting donation behaviors. The paper concludes with managerial implications and limitations of the study.

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## 1. Introduction

In December 2004, the world watched in horror as a tsunami hit Asian coasts. Spontaneously, many people from around the world wished to make donations to help the affected populations. In a rush, most of these donors turned to traditional, well-known associations involved in humanitarian aid. The statistics show that the associations that collected the most donations after the 2004 tsunami disaster closely matches those with the highest rates of spontaneous recognition (Appendix 1). While this correlation shows that donors trusted the best-known charities, it also raises the question as to whether a good image or perceptions of being truly “typical” of humanitarian aid can fully explain the high correlation between donating and spontaneous recognition.

Given the importance of fundraising in the nonprofit sector and of understanding the role of branding in donor behavior more clearly, this research has two objectives: first, it aims to identify the components of nonprofit brand image and develop a specific scale. With the exception of (Bennett and Gabriel, 2003), to date, there is only one scale developed to measure nonprofit brand image. Predominantly inspired by business practices, this scale does not adequately reflect the characteristics of the nonprofit world, thus

making it necessary to create a new tool more suitable for nonprofit brands. This necessity is also articulated by Bennett and Sargeant (2005, p. 800) who called for “measuring the images, identities and reputations of nonprofit organizations and, of course, the development of new instruments specially constructed for the nonprofit sector”. In keeping with this, the second objective of the paper is to test the influence of nonprofit brand image and typicality on intentions to donate (time or money).

## 2. Conceptual foundation

### 2.1. Nonprofit brand image

A brand is a name, term, sign, drawing, or any combination of these, that serves to identify a firm's goods or services and differentiate them from those of competitors (American Marketing Association, AMA). However, much more than a sign, the brand is also a signifier associated with content in the consumer's mind. Given the ever-increasing number of nonprofit organizations and the subsequent increase in competition for donations, the nonprofit brand, through its identification system (e.g., via a name, logo, design, jingle, etc.) is becoming an important element in differentiating charitable organizations.

Despite the rising importance of nonprofit brands in securest donations, relatively scarce research attention has been given to the topic. To date, only a single study has examined the concept of nonprofit brand image, attempting to identify its impact. In their study, Bennett and Gabriel (2003) show that more favorable brand image results in higher number of donations ( $R^2 = .69$ ). While their nonprofit brand image consists of five dimensions (compassion, dynamism, idealism, focus on beneficiaries and non-political image), it is predominantly based on concepts used in commercial rather than nonprofit branding. The authors identified the scale items partly from the literature on

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corporate reputation that is specific to commercial brands and also used the reputation indices from the Fortune magazine.

Although, nonprofit brand image does not seem to have garnered much research attention, the same is not true for nonprofit brand personality. Pursuing this idea, more researchers have measured brand personality of nonprofit organizations and its influence on donation intentions. One study developed a parsimonious measure for nonprofit brand personality based on the work of Aaker (1991) using 4 dimensions: integrity, ruggedness, sophistication and nurturance (Venable et al., 2005). Their results show that these four dimensions of brand personality can explain donation intention, but the explanatory power of each dimension does not exceed 20%. Another study examined the link between nonprofit brand personality and actual donations (Sargeant et al., 2008a). Their findings show that brand personality dimensions (emotional engagement, tradition, service and voice) only explain the 4% of the total donations and 6% of the last donation (both explained by a single dimension, emotional engagement). Finally, the results of a qualitative study about brand personality conducted by Sargeant et al. (2008b) highlight that, while it is difficult for charities to find a means of differentiation, they can stand out through emotional stimulation (being strong, bold, exciting, fun, heroic and inspiring) and performance (being prudent, efficient, effective, wasteful and bureaucratic).

Table 1 summarizes the three scales already published on the subject and shows the diversity of qualifiers used to describe the image and personality of charities.

**Table 1**  
Summary of different measures of nonprofit brand image and personality.

Authors	Bennett and Gabriel (2003)	Venable et al. (2005)	Sargeant et al. (2008a)
Scales	Brand image	Brand personality	Brand personality
	Compassion : Compassionate Caring Feeling Trustworthy	Integrity : Honest Reputable Reliable Positive influence	Benevolence : Ethical Fair Helpful Reputable
	Reliable Dynamism : Progressive Visionary Innovative This is a charity that others should try to emulate	Committed Ruggedness : Masculine Outdoorsy Tough Western	Supportive Sympathetic Progression : Empowering Engaging Pioneering
	Efficient Idealism : Idealistic Focus on beneficiaries : Focuses spending on beneficiaries rather than administration Political orientation :	Sophistication : Glamorous Upper Class Good-looking Nurturance :	Transforming Visionary Conservatism : Cautious Conservative
	This charity is highly political This charity gets things done Reputation: The charity uses its assets wisely Financially sound Provides an excellent service to Beneficiaries Well managed Capable Has a good long-term future Has excellent employees This charity is very well known This charity has achieved a great deal	Compassionate Charitable Loving Caring	Emotional engagement : Exciting Fun Heroic Innovative  Inspiring Modern  Tradition : Traditional Service : Approachable Compassionate Dedicated
			Voice : Ambitious Authoritative Bold

This discussion underlines that while charities can use brand personality to differentiate themselves, the existing studies do not explain more than 20% of intentions to give and 6% of actual donations. In order to build on these studies and expand knowledge of the impact of brand image on donations, the present research entirely focuses on brand image and not brand personality. Indeed, the concept of brand image can serve to differentiate the roles of functional and symbolic associations of the brand. The notion of associations used in previous studies (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993) presents the advantage of grouping all knowledge of the brand without focusing on certain specific aspects of image such as personality traits or values.

Two main types of associations are identifiable: functional and symbolic (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Hankinson, 2001). Functional associations link to the product characteristics or functional benefits of commercial brands. For nonprofit organizations, functional associations refer to the characteristics of the organization, its missions and tangible qualities. Symbolic associations are abstract cognitions that translate the values of the organization, personality traits associated with the brand and even emotions. Furthermore, functional and symbolic associations give a positive, negative or neutral dimension to brand image, directly affecting preference and purchase intention of branded products (Park and Srinivasan, 1994). Therefore, through analogy, brand image influences the attitude of individuals and impacts donation behaviors in the context of nonprofits. Since donations to nonprofit organizations can consist of either money or time, this research studies both of these types, in keeping with some of the previous studies (such as Samu and Wymer, 2009).

Since donations of time are more involving than money, the decision-making process can differ. Donations of time procure greater satisfaction than donations of money, the latter being more of a rational rather than emotional decision (Liu and Aaker, 2008). The emotional dimensions of nonprofit brands are more likely to exert a stronger influence than functional dimensions on intentions to donate time.

## 2.2. Typicality

While brand image can influence charitable behaviors, typicality of the organization in the nonprofit sector can also have a significant impact on decisions to donate. The concept of typicality is based on the principle of categorization (Rosch, 1978). The brand is a cognitive structure and supposes the existence of a prototype brand organization (Dawar and Anderson, 1994). The prototype refers to the most representative product of a given brand, with the remainder products ranging on a gradient of typicality according to their degree of similarity with the prototype (Smith and Medin, 1981). A product is typical of the brand when it is perceived as consistent with the brand's image. In the context of brand extension, research shows that intention to buy is higher for typical products than for atypical products (Ward and Loken, 1988). Based on this theoretical framework, the present study focuses on the typicality of the brand in its product category. Thus, for example, an individual can consider an association atypical of a humanitarian cause when it is inconsistent with the image that he has of that particular cause. Therefore, it is proposed that the more typical the organization in its "mission category" the higher the giving intentions for that organization will be. For example, donors could perceive Red Cross as a more typical organization in humanitarian aid compared to Doctors Without Borders and pledge more money to the former. Therefore, perception of the organization's typicality in the humanitarian field is expected to influence charitable giving.

## 3. Method

Three sets of data were collected for this study. The first consisted of qualitative data which enabled the identification of items to measure nonprofit brand image and build the scale. The two subsequent

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