

Charitable Maximizers: The Impact of the Maximizing Mindset on Donations to Human Causes

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Abstract

The majority of donations are dedicated to human causes. Building on prior literature that demonstrates the role of downward social comparisons between donors and donation recipients in elevating willingness to help those in need, we propose that a maximizing mindset increases such downward social comparisons, which in turn promotes donations to human causes. A set of six studies, including online and field experiments and a secondary dataset, provides convergent support for the effect of the maximizing mindset on donations and the mediating role of downward social comparisons. This research offers important insights to donation-raising agencies. Specifically, activating the maximizing mindset among prospective donors—by embedding certain words in donation appeals or encouraging donors to think about their best choices in everyday life—could benefit charities and social-cause support platforms in their efforts to raise donations to support the needy.

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