

Giving Back or Holding Back: How Reciprocity Impacts the Perceived Value of Charity Gifts

Diletta Acuti

University of Bath

Marta Pizzetti

emLyon Business School

Isabella Soscia

SKEMA Business School

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Abstract:

Charity gifts, where donations are made on behalf of recipients, often face low appreciation despite their ethical intent. This research explores why recipients dislike such gifts and identifies conditions under which they might be valued. Four studies confirm that charity gifts are generally less appreciated than traditional ones, but they gain favour in non-reciprocal exchanges. The zero-sum mindset theory explains these findings, linking their lower appreciation to their perceived lower value. When the value of charity gifts is increased (e.g., via higher prices), differences in appreciation lessen. Charity gifts are recommended in situations where reciprocity is not expected, as they prevent discomfort from gift imbalances and break cycles of reciprocal obligation. Non-profits should target such occasions positioning charity gifts as appealing options for both givers and recipients.