

Impact Timing versus Magnitude: Consumer Perceptions of Nonprofits' Resource Allocation Strategies

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Abstract

Nonprofits often face decisions about when to allocate funds—whether to use them immediately or reserve them for future initiatives. Operating within resource constraints, this resource allocation decision introduces a tradeoff between the timing and magnitude of the impact. In this research, we investigate this tradeoff, focusing on how consumers evaluate charities that prioritize larger, future impacts over smaller, immediate ones. We propose that consumers place greater emphasis on impact timing than impact magnitude. Across six studies, we demonstrate that nonprofits pursuing larger, future benefits are perceived as less effective and less moral, resulting in lower donation support, compared to those opting for smaller, immediate benefits. We discuss the theoretical and managerial implications of our findings for nonprofits navigating the delicate balance between creating immediate impact and larger impact.

Track: Consumer Behaviour