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Increasing charity donations for identifiable
and statistical victims by a poster design

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Abstract

This study aimed at discovering the best combination of identifiable or statistical victims, positive or negative message framing, and shocking or non-shocking images, to be used in the poster design of a charity campaign in order to increase willingness to donate. In order to do so, a study with a 2x2x2 between-subjects design was conducted, testing eight different poster designs. Manipulation checks showed that the 200 hundred participants of the test ($M = 27.48$ ($SD = 9.24$), 37.5% male, 61% female, and 1,5% other) were able to correctly recognize the three variables when they were presented with the posters. However, no significant effect of message framing on willingness to donate was found. A marginally significant effect of the type of victim on willingness to donate was found, showing a higher level of willingness to donate for the identifiable victim. Shock images were found to have a significant positive effect on fear, sadness and shock. However, shock was measured by surprise and disgust, and whereas surprise had a positive effect on willingness to donate, disgust had a negative effect on the willingness to donate. This finding suggests that other types of shock would be more beneficial for charity campaigns, combining surprise with other offense elicitor. Finally, the linear regression testing the combined effect of type of victim, message framing and shock images did not give significant results. The many non-significant results are due to the several limitations of the poster design and online questionnaire. Nonetheless, the findings about shock images, shock measurement, and shock effect on willingness to donate present meaningful practical implications and present a good starting point for further research.

1, Introduction

Nowadays, many prosocial charity campaigns are designed to address environmental and societal problems. However, there are several ways in which organizations can address an issue. Victims can be presented as identifiable or statistical. Identifiable victims are presented as individuals (or small groups such as a family) described with detailed personal information such as age, name, face, and specific difficulties (Lee & Feeley, 2017; Small & Loewenstein, 2003). On the other hand, statistical victims are presented as a large group described with only general information about all group members, such as their country of origin and common difficulty (Lee et al., 2017). This study aims at finding the most effective poster designs to increase willingness to donate for both identifiable and statistical victims . The fictional campaign designed for this study was focused on children in need of medical treatments in Syria, an issue addressed by well-known organizations like Save the Children and UNICEF. These organizations are trying to help thousands of children in Syria who are suffering because they don't have access to medical treatments. For this reason, it is extremely important to design campaigns that can help as much people as possible, not only focusing on specific individuals. In order to find a solution, eight different posters were designed, addressing this same problem in different ways, and their effect was tested based on a 2x2x2 between-subjects design. As a matter of fact, based on literature, three variables were identified, to find the best combination to increase willingness to donate.

The first variable was the type of victim. The victim in the poster was either identifiable, giving a personal name (Fatima), which made it possible to identify the victim, or statistical, giving only an overall number of the children who are affected by the problem. The second variable was message

framing, which was either positive or negative. The positive message framing emphasized the potential benefits of the donation, stating how the children or Fatima would have benefited from the donation. On the other hand, the negative message framing emphasized the potential loss for the victim if the donations were not provided. Finally, the third variable considered was the use of shocking images. Two images were used, the shocking one showing a child with blood and bruises on her face, and the pleasing (or non-shocking) one showing the same child without blood and bruises.

The effects of type of victim, message framing, and shock images on willingness to donate or donating behavior have already been tested by previous studies. This study aims at discovering what the best combination of these three elements to increase the willingness to donate for both identifiable and statistical victims is.

2. Theoretical framework

As highlighted by Grinstein, Hagtvedt and Kronrod (2018), achieving the intended goal is challenging, and these campaigns often turn out to be ineffective. Furthermore, as can be found in the literature, individual identifiable victims seem to attract more donations than statistical victims. However, if the same amount of money were used to help more victims, the people who would benefit would be more, leading to better overall effects (Loewenstein, Small & Strnad, 2005; Small, Loewenstein & Slovic, 2005). At the same time, Loewenstein et al. (2005) argue that even if raising money for specific victims might distort aid allocation, it might still be more effective than raising money for statistical victims, since it would result in a lower amount of donations. Therefore, this study will consider charity campaigns addressing identifiable victims and those addressing statistical victims of equal importance, aiming to find a solution to improve willingness to donate for both statistical and identifiable victims.

Three main antecedents of willingness to donate have been identified in the literature: positive or negative message framing, use of shock images, and the use of identifiable or statistical victims. Therefore, the effect of each

of these elements and their interaction is investigated to find the best combination to increase the willingness to donate.

2.1 Identifiable and statistical victims

As mentioned above, identifiable victims are described with detailed personal information such as age, name, face, and specific difficulties (Lee & Feeley, 2017; Small & Loewenstein, 2003). On the other hand, statistical victims represent as a larger group described only by general information, such as their country of origin and common difficulty (Lee et al., 2017).

The identifiable victim effect (IVE), which defines the tendency people have to donate more to identified individual victims rather than to unidentified statistical victims, has been widely investigated in the literature. As stated by Kogut (2011), people seem to be more generous and willing to contribute towards identifiable victims, even when the identification does not convey any meaningful information about the victim. According to Cryder and Loewenstein (2011), just knowing the age, gender, or hair color of a victim makes people value more his or her life than just a statistical victim. As a result, identifiable victims trigger a stronger emotional appeal, more empathy, and more distress, resulting in more donations (Lee et al., 2017; Kogut 2011). Furthermore, identifiable victims can attract more donations because it is clear where the money of the donation is going, how many people are at risk, and the victim represents the whole reference group (Garcia, Massoni, and Villeval, 2018; Jenni et al., 1997). Indeed, as argued by Garcia et al. (2018), a donation that may have ambiguous costs or ambiguous benefits can lead to excuse-driven behavior and result in lower donations.

However, identifiable victims do not necessarily attract more donations than statistical victims. As argued by Kogut (2011), people often try to find a justification to reduce their anxiety and persuade themselves that no injustice occurs. Thus, they often find a reason to justify the wrongness by blaming the victim, especially in the case of weak people and groups such as refugees, people with AIDS, unemployed people, elderly and poor people (Kogut, 2011). When the victim is perceived as responsible for

the problem, the intention to agree with the cause and the intention to help is decreased compared to an unidentified victim in the same situation, as identifying the victim can lead to more beneficence or more punishment (Kogut, 2011; Loewenstein et al., 2005). Empathy is a crucial driver of prosocial behavior and is triggered by identification and perceived need (Grinstein et al. 2018).

For this reason, identifiable victims are expected to trigger more empathy, as identification and perceived need are antecedents of empathy (Grinstein et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2017; Kogut 2011). Both emotional and analytical elements can motivate people to help (Erlandsson, Västfjäll, Sundfelt & Slovic, 2016). Moreover, identification is found to help only single victims without affecting groups of victims (Kogut & Ritov, 2005).

Finally, Erlandsson et al. (2016) suggest that both analytical and emotional arguments can be beneficial for a charity campaign, but mixing different arguments, could be detrimental. A study conducted by Small et al. (2005) demonstrated that including statistics alongside an identifiable victim lowers the donations' amount, maybe because people become unsure that the identified victim would receive the donation.

H1a: Identifiable victims, as opposed to statistical victims, have a positive effect on willingness to donate.

H1b: The effect of type of victim on willingness to donate is mediated by empathy.

H1c: Identifiable victims, as opposed to statistical victims, have a positive effect on empathy

2.2 Message framing

In this study, message framing refers to the use of negative (or loss-framed) messages and positive (or gain-framed) message (Smith & Petty, 1996). According to Chang and Lee (2009), both positive and negative message framing is shown to be more effective than neutrally framed messages.

Indeed, negative message framing can make people feel more concerned about potential loss and more compelled about donating, it can be more persuasive, and it can be more effective in grabbing attention (Chang et al. 2009). At the same time, positive message framing can make the goal feel more attainable compared to negative message framing and can facilitate willingness to help (Chang et al., 2009). Indeed, framing a message as positive, for example, by stating how many people would be helped by a donation, instead of telling how many people are in danger might increase the feeling of having an impact. Even if people declare to be equally concerned about potential risk and certain risk, they tend to be unconsciously more concerned toward the victim when a large portion of the reference group is subjected to a certain risk (Jenni & Loewenstein, 1997). When framing a message as positive by stating the number of people that would benefit from the donation, the beneficiaries would constitute 100% of the reference group.

H2: Positive message framing, as opposed to negative message framing, positively influences willingness to donate

2.3 Shock images

The use of shock images is increasingly popular in advertising, also in the philanthropic context (Jansen, 2015; Cockrill & Parsonage, 2016). However, its efficacy in the charity donation context still has to be tested. According to Dahl, Frankenberger, and Manchanda (2003), shock images are found to draw attention, facilitate memory, and trigger actual behavior thanks to its fear appeal. However, if a solution to the problem is not presented in the advertisement and if the audience feels directly threatened by the danger, triggering fear might backfire and result in lower attention engagement, low recall, and low financial contribution (Jansen, 2015). Similarly, Albouy (2017) found that negative emotions such as sadness, fear, and shock are found to improve helping behavior because of defense reflexes, corrective or compensatory actions, and militant involvement. However, if excessively tragic visuals are used, the effect is reversed, giving a feeling of helplessness, cognitive rumination, and reactance, thus reducing charitable

giving. Furthermore, Jansen (2015) argues that shock images do not seem to affect attention holding and memory, contrary to what Dhal et al. (as cited by Jansen 2015) had found. Accordingly, shock images can capture people's attention, but they are not enough to keep them interested and make them willing to donate.

H3a: Shock images, as opposed to pleasing visuals, have a positive impact on willingness to donate

H3b: Shock images' effect on willingness to donate is mediated by sadness, fear, and shock.

Moreover, Grinstein et al. (2018) investigated the role of appealing and unappealing images to trigger prosocial behavior. Attractive individuals are found to get more attention and better treatment, as pleasing visuals are beneficial to trigger identification and empathy (Grinstein et al., 2018). Displeasing visuals are found to increase the perceived need, which would be beneficial to enhance the helping behavior in favor of groups of statistical victims (Grinstein et al., 2018). According to this finding, shock images might be beneficial to increase the willingness to donate in favor of statistical victims. Furthermore, using shock images together with a negative message (as well as non-shocking images together with positive message framing) might improve congruency, resulting in a more effective overall design (Chang et al. 2009).

H4a: Combining identifiable victims with pleasing visuals and positive message framing has a positive impact on willingness to donate, compared to combining identifiable victims with shock images and negative message framing

H4b: Combining statistical victims with shock images and negative message framing has a positive impact on willingness to donate, compared to combining statistical victims with pleasing visuals and positive message framing.

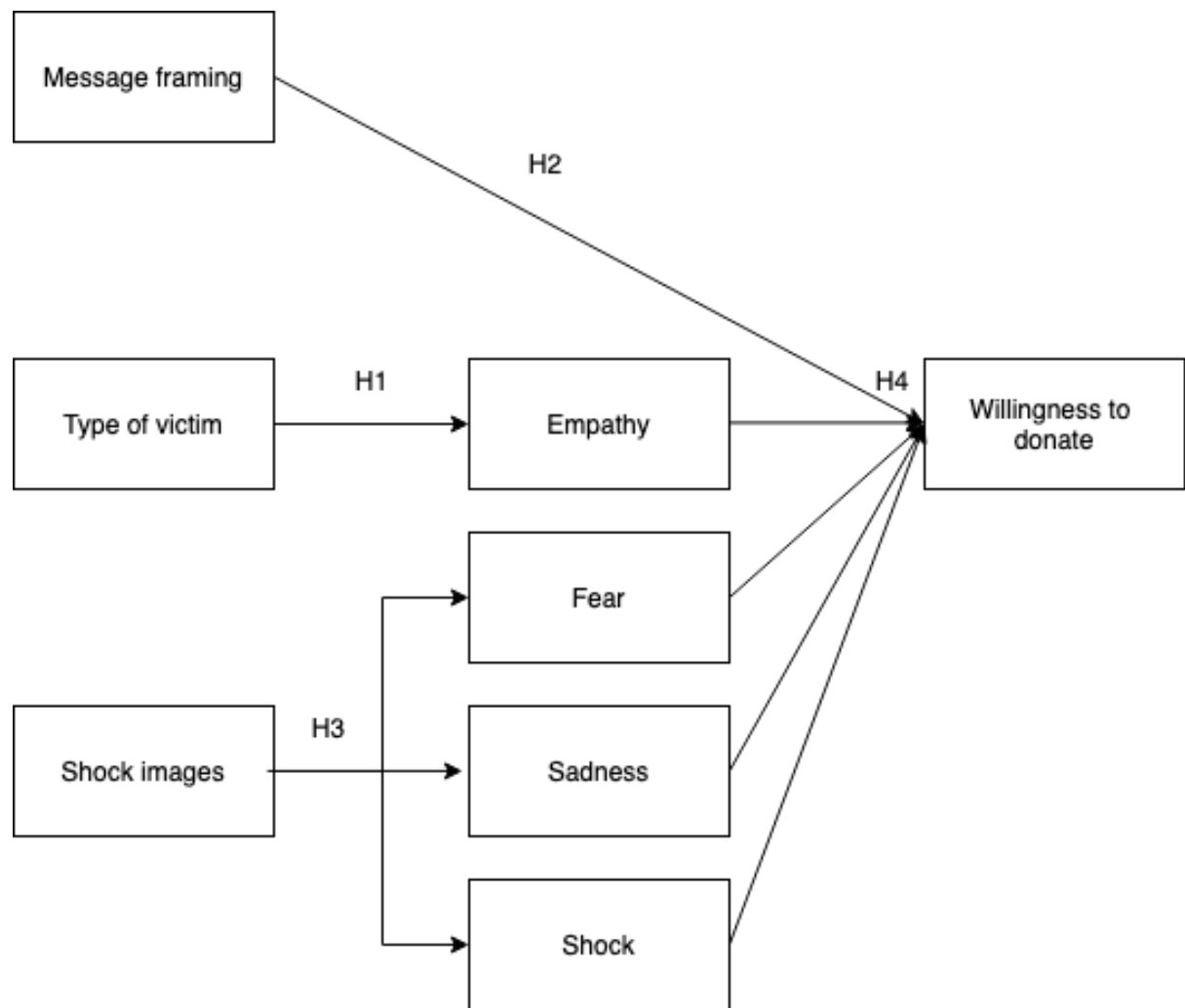


Figure 1. Conceptual model

3. Method

3.1 Participants

Participants were found by convenience sampling, aiming for a sample of 200 people. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling where participants can be selected because of easy accessibility, availability, and willingness to participate (Etikan, 2016). The only limitation imposed on the sample was that participants' age had to be over 18 years, as participants had to be potential donors for charity campaigns. Participants meeting these criteria were reached online through social media. The online questionnaire was indeed the most accessible data collection method for our participants.

In total, the sample of the study consisted of 200 participants (37.5% male, 61% female and 1,5% other) with a mean age of $M = 27.48$ ($SD = 9.24$). Regarding participants' occupation, 68% were students, 24% were employed, 3.5% were currently unemployed, and 4.5% selected "other" as an option. Regarding nationality, 13% were Dutch, 12.5% were German, 23% were Italian, and 51.5% selected "other" as an option.

3.2 Stimulus material

The study consisted of a 2x2x2 between-subjects design. Thus, eight posters were designed, with different combinations of statistical or identifiable victims, positive or negative message framing, and shocking or non-shocking images (see figure 2). Below each poster, in figure 2, the percentage of participants who were exposed to it is reported.



13.5%



12%



12.5%



13%



12.5%



12.5%



12.5%



11.5%

Figure 2. Posters design

3.3 Pre-test

In order to make sure that the message framing, type of victim, and images were perceived as planned, a pre-test consisting of ten individual qualitative interviews was designed. The interviews were conducted through Skype video calls or in-person with two experts and eight potential members of the study's sample.

For the pre-test, two contexts were designed. The first one about migrants in the Mediterranean Sea and the second one about children in Syria. First, the ten interviewees were provided with a definition of identifiable victims and statistical victims. They were asked to what extent they considered each of the following eight statements (four for each context) to refer to statistical or identifiable victims. Almost every participant was able to recognize all of the eight statements correctly.

Participants were then presented with four images, two for each context. For each image, participants were asked how surprised and shocked they felt when looking at the image. The first and second images were the shocking image and the non-shocking image for the migrants' context (Carleton & Garen, 2018; Harris, 2018). The third and fourth images were the non-shocking image and the shocking image for the children's context. The fourth image was a non-copyrighted image retrieved from Pixabay.com, while the third image was the same picture edited with Adobe Photoshop 2020. After evaluating each image, they were finally asked which one did they find to be the most shocking and which one did they find to be the least shocking. Half of the participants referred to the first image as the most shocking; the other half referred to the fourth picture as the most shocking. Thus, the shocking images of the two contexts were found to be equally shocking. However, most of the participants selected the third image as the least shocking, and some referred to the second one as "slightly less shocking than the first one." Therefore, the two images of the children's context showed a broader difference in the shock level, compared to the migrant's context images. For this reason, children's context images were preferred for the study,

even though a few participants pointed out that the non-shocking one "was clearly photoshopped."

The final section of the pre-test tested message framing. Participants were informed about the meaning of positive and negative message framing. Then, the same sentences that were shown in the first section were presented in a different order, asking participants to rate to what extent they considered each statement to have a positive or negative message framing. In order to avoid confounding variables, in every statement with identifiable victims, the same name was used. Every statement showing a price for the donation displayed the same price of 20€, and in order to make the statements realistic, data regarding the price and benefits were retrieved from or inspired by a real donation campaign from UNICEF, UNHCR, MSF, and Open Arms.

Furthermore, data about the number of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea was retrieved from the UNHCR reports (UNHCR, 2020). Regarding message framing, most participants gave wrong answers to statements 6 and 8, while giving the right answers to all of the other statements. Almost every participant was found to have no doubt when asked to recognize statistical and identifiable victims. Thus, four messages were selected for the study, related to the children's context

(one positive and one negative for the statistical victim, one positive and one negative for the identifiable victim). Therefore, the statement about the number of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea was adapted to the Syrian context, using data from SOHR (SOHR, 2020). These statements, together with the images of the child, were put together in a design inspired by charity campaign posters by Save the Children. Finally, the logo of a fictional organization was added. The logo of a real organization was not used in order to avoid biases given by previous experiences with the brand.

3.4 Procedure and measures

The following procedure was approved by the Ethical Committee BMS of the University of Twente. Each participant was presented with one version of the posters. After the vision of the posters, participants were asked to

self-report their emotions and willingness to donate on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree (Babbie, 2016; Dahl, Frankenberg, Manchada 2003) (see questionnaire in appendix). Empathy was measured as a combination of perceived need and identification, on a 4-item scale adjusted from Grinstein et al. (2018) 3-item scale with the addition of "I feel that the victim(s) need(s) help," to better test perceived need ($\alpha = .79$). According to the Differential Emotions Scale (DES) (Izard, 1982), sadness was measured by three items: downhearted, sad, and discouraged ($\alpha = .60$). Fear was measured within five components: fearful, nervous, scared, nauseated, and uncomfortable ($\alpha = .81$) (Block & Keller, 1995). Since images showing blood and harm were used as shocking images and surprise is the other component of shock (Dahl et al., 2003), the six components in the DES referring to disgust ($\alpha = .70$) and surprise ($\alpha = .69$) were used. Finally, willingness to donate was measured by a 4-item scale ($\alpha = .95$) adapted from Mittelman and Rojas-Mendez (2018).

At the end of the questionnaire, manipulation checks were included in order to test if the type of victim, message framing, and images were perceived in the intended way. Participants were asked to agree or disagree on a 7-point Likert scale with six statements, two per antecedent.

4. Results

4.1 Manipulation checks

Independent t-tests were conducted to test the above-mentioned manipulation checks. First, the mean results of the two statements about the type of victim were compared with the statistical or identifiable victim conditions. The results were significant, $t(198) = -5.00, p < .01$, showing a difference in means between statistical victims ($M = 2.87, SD = 1.10$) and identifiable victims ($M = 3.62, SD = 1.02$). Secondly, the mean results of the two statements about message framing were compared with positive or negative message framing conditions. The results were significant, $t(198) = -4.05, p < .01$, showing a difference in means between negative message

framing ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.35$) and positive message framing ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.37$). Thirdly, the mean results of the two statements about images were compared with shock or pleasing image conditions. The results were significant, $t(198) = -4.66$, $p < .01$, showing a difference in means between pleasing image ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.27$) and shock image ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 1.16$). These results suggest that participants correctly recognized all the conditions.

4.2 Effect of type of victim on willingness to donate

A mediation analysis was used to test if the effect of type of victim on willingness to donate is mediated by empathy (H1b) (see figure 3). The statistical model showed a non-significant effect of type of victim on empathy, $b = .12$, s.e. = .17, $p = .47$, 95% C.I. (-.21, .46). A significant effect of empathy on willingness to donate was found, $b = .93$, s.e. = .06, $p < .01$, 95% C.I. (.80, 1.06). Furthermore, a marginally significant positive direct effect of type of victim on willingness to donate was found, $b = .28$, s.e. = .15, $p = .07$, 95% C.I. (-.59, .03), meaning that participants presented with identifiable victims had a higher willingness to donate (H1a). No significant correlation was found between type of victim and empathy $r = -.53$, $p = .46$, $n = 200$. A significant correlation was found between empathy and willingness to donate $r = .71$, $p < .01$, $n = 200$. No significant correlation was found between type of victim and willingness to donate, $r = -.05$, $p = .46$, $n = 200$. According to these results, the null-hypothesis was not rejected.

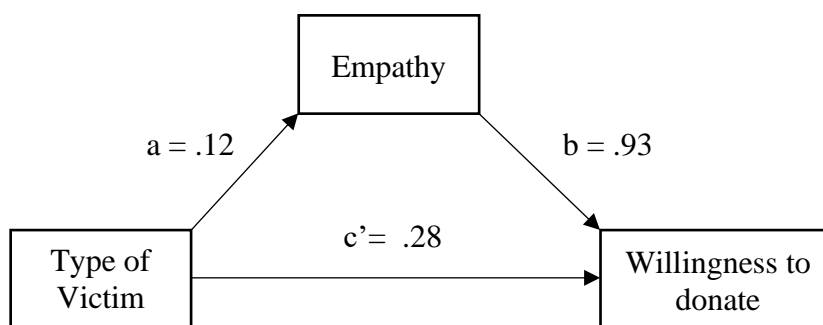


Figure 3.

A linear regression tested the effect of the type of victim on empathy (H1b). No significant interaction was found, $F(1,198) = .52, p = .47$. As previously mentioned, no significant correlation was found between the type of victim and empathy. Therefore, the null-hypothesis was not rejected.

A linear regression tested the effect of type of victim on willingness to donate (H1a). No significant interaction was found, $F(1,198) = .56, p = .46$. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, no significant correlation was found between the type of victim and willingness to donate. Therefore, the null-hypothesis was not rejected.

4.3 Effect of message framing on willingness to donate

In order to test H2, a linear regression analysis tested the effect of message framing on willingness to donate. No significant effect was found, $F(1,198) = 2.10, p = .15$. Furthermore, no significant correlation was found between message framing and willingness to donate, $r = .10, p = .15, n = 200$. Therefore, the null-hypothesis was not rejected.

4.4 Effect of shock images on willingness to donate

Four mediation analyses were run to test if the effect of shock images on willingness to donate was mediated by fear, sadness and shock (measured by surprise and disgust) (H3a). The first model tested if the effect of shock images on willingness to donate mediated by fear (see figure 4). The model showed a significant effect of shock images on fear, $b = .43, s.e. = .17, p = .01, 95\% \text{ C.I. } (-.10, .77)$, meaning that participants presented with shock images presented a higher level of fear. Furthermore, a significant effect of fear on willingness to donate was found, $b = .24, s.e. = .09, p = .01, 95\% \text{ C.I. } (.06, .42)$. The direct effect of shock images on willingness to donate was found to be non-significant $b = .19, s.e. = .22, p = .40, 95\% \text{ C.I. } (-.25, .63)$. A correlation was found between shock images and fear, $r = .18, p = .01, n = 200$, and between fear and willingness to donate $r = .19, p = .01, n$

= 200. No correlation was found between shock images willingness to donate, $r = .09$, $p = .19$, $n = 200$.

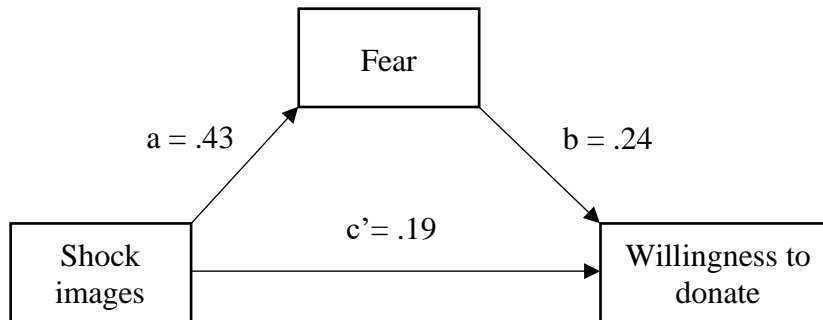


Figure 4.

The second model tested if the effect of shock images on willingness to donate is mediated by sadness (see figure 5). The model showed a significant effect of shock images on sadness, $b = .34$, $s.e. = .16$, $p = .03$, 95% C.I. (.03, .65), meaning that participants presented with shock images presented a higher level of sadness. A significant effect of sadness on willingness to donate was found $b = .51$, $s.e. = .09$, $p < .01$, 95% C.I. (.32, .69). A non-significant direct effect of shock image on willingness to donate was found, $b = .12$, $s.e. = .21$, $p = .57$, 95% C.I. (- .30, .53). A significant correlation was found between shock images and sadness $r = .09$, $p = .19$, $n = 200$, and between sadness and willingness to donate, $r = .36$, $p < .01$, $n = 200$.

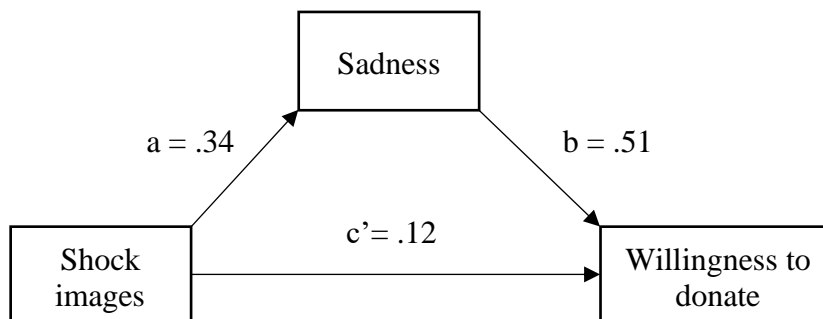


Figure 5.

The third model tested if the effect of shock images on willingness to donate is mediated by surprise (see figure 6). The model showed a significant effect of shock images on surprise, $b = .12$, $s.e. = .16$, $p = .46$, 95% C.I. (- .20, .45), meaning that participants presented with shock images presented a higher level of surprise. Furthermore, a significant effect of surprise on willingness to donate was found, $b = .46$, $s.e. = .09$, $p < .01$, 95% C.I. (.29, .64). The direct effect of shock images on willingness to donate was found to be non-significant, $b = .23$, $s.e. = .21$, $p = .27$, 95% C.I. (- .18, .65). No significant correlation between shock images and surprise was found, $r = .05$, $p = .46$, $n = 200$. A significant correlation was found between surprise and willingness to donate, $r = .35$, $p < .01$, $n = 200$.

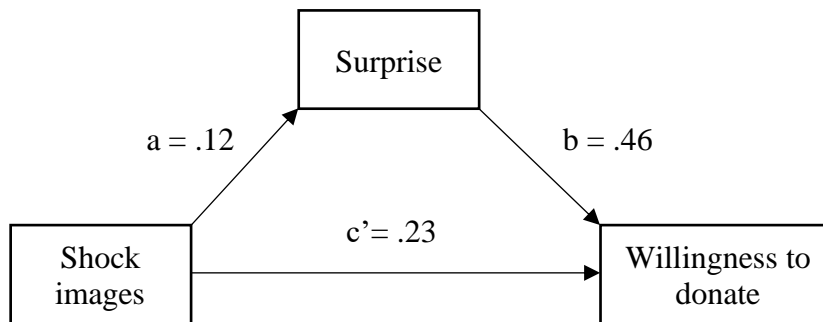


Figure 6.

The fourth model tested if the effect of shock images on willingness to donate is mediated by disgust (see figure 7). The model showed a significant effect of shock images on disgust, $b = .57$, $s.e. = .18$, $p < .01$, 95% C.I. (.21, .93), meaning that participants presented with shock images presented a higher level of disgust. Moreover, a significant effect of disgust on willingness to donate was found, $b = -.24$, $s.e. = .08$, $p = .01$, 95% C.I. (- .41, -.07). Finally, a marginally significant direct effect of shock images on willingness to donate was found, $b = .43$, $s.e. = .22$, $p = .06$, 95% C.I. (- .01, .87). A significant correlation was found between shock images and disgust, $r = .21$, $p < .01$, $n = 200$, and between disgust and willingness to donate, $r = -.17$, $p = .01$, $n = 200$. According to these results, the null-hypothesis was rejected

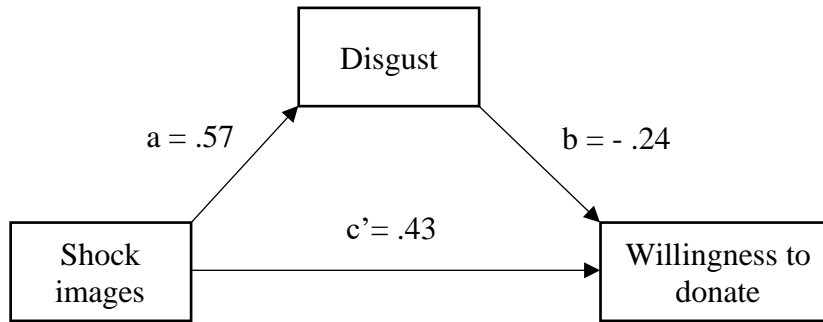


Figure 7.

A linear regression tested the effect of shock images on willingness to donate (H3b). No significant interaction was found, $F(1,198) = 1.715$, $p = .19$. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, no correlation was found between shock images and willingness to donate. Therefore, the null-hypothesis was not rejected.

4.5 Effect of type of victim, shock images and message framing on willingness to donate

A linear regression tested the effect of type of victim, shock images, and message framing on willingness to donate (H4a, H4b). No significant effect was found, $F(1,199) = 1.715$, $p = .96$. Accordingly, as previously reported, no correlation was found between the type of victim and willingness to donate, between message framing and willingness to donate, and between shock images and willingness to donate. Furthermore, no significant correlation was found between type of victim and shock images, $r < .01$, $p = .99$, $n = 200$. Moreover, no significant correlation was found between type of victim and message framing, $r = .01$, $p = .88$, $n = 200$. Therefore, the null-hypotheses were not rejected.

Hypothesis	Results
H1a	Not supported
H1b	Not supported
H1c	Not supported
H2	Not supported
H3a	Not supported
H3b	Supported
H4a	Not supported
H4b	Not supported

Table 1.

5. Discussion

This study aimed at analyzing the effect type of victim, message framing, and shock images on willingness to donate in the context of a charity campaign, in order to find the best combination to increase willingness to donate. Based on the literature, a model was tested where the effect of type of victim (statistical or identifiable victim) on willingness to donate was mediated by empathy, the effect of shocking or pleasing images was mediated by sadness, fear and shock and message framing (positive or negative) had a direct effect on willingness to donate. In this section, results from data analysis and findings are discussed.

5.1 Type of victim

Manipulation checks suggested that participants correctly identified statistical and identifiable victims. Results confirmed the strong correlation between empathy and willingness to donate. However, the type of victim was not found to have a significant effect on empathy, and the effect of the type of victim on willingness to donate was only marginally significant. These findings were in contrast with literature, as empathy is found in the literature to be one of the critical factors that explain the effect of type of victim on willingness to donate (Cryder et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2017;

Kogut 2011). However, the marginally significant direct effect of the type of victim on willingness to donate supported the literature findings by confirming the IVE (Kogut, 2011).

A possible reason why the type of victim did not affect empathy and only a marginal impact on willingness to donate could be the poster visuals. Indeed, statistical and identifiable victims were differentiated by the framing of the text, whereas the images and other design elements stayed the same. All participants were shown the image of a child looking at them. This image may have increased the identifiability of the victim, even when the textual message was framed as statistical (Cryder et al., 2011; Kogut 2011). Another reason why the type of victim did not give the expected results, even if the manipulation checks suggested a correct understanding from participants, lies in the phrasing of the statements used for the manipulation check. Indeed, the second statement used to check the manipulation of the type of victim ("The victim was representative of a larger population") may have been ambiguous. Participants could have interpreted the victim as a specific identifiable individual and, at the same time, consider the victim as representative of other people in a similar situation.

5.2 Message framing

Manipulation checks suggested that participants correctly identified positive and negative message framing. However, when tested, no effect of message framing on willingness to donate was found. In contrast with literature, this would suggest that framing a message as positive or negative has no impact on the willingness to donate. One explanation for this result may be that both positive and negative message framing is found to have a more positive impact on willingness to donate, compared to neutral framed messages (Chang et al., 2009). Indeed, even though messages framed as positive are usually more favored by consumers (Shiv, Edell and Payne, 1997), negatively framed messages are found to work better in high-risk situations. At the same time, according to Shiv et al. (1997), negative message framing is expected to work better in case of an

impulse purchase. As this study required participants to reflect on the posters and rate a large number of statements about their impressions and emotions, the effectiveness of negative message framing may have been lowered.

Therefore, as no neutral message was included in the study, no difference between the two groups would emerge. Furthermore, the context of charity donations for children in a war zone may have influenced these results.

5.3 Shock images

Manipulation checks suggested that participants correctly identified shock and pleasing images. Even if a direct effect of shock images on willingness to donate was not found, results showed an indirect effect mediated by sadness, fear, and shock (measured as surprise and disgust). According to Hayes (2009), the reason why the direct effect is non-significant while all indirect effects are significant is that the effects of the mediators end up canceling each other. One reason is probably that disgust has a negative effect on willingness to donate, while the other mediators have a positive effect. These findings are in line with the literature. Indeed, according to Albouy (2017), fear, sadness, and shock improve defense reflexes, corrective or compensatory actions, and militant behavior, thus increasing helping behavior. The findings of this study match with those of Dahl et al. (2003), in contrast with the findings of Jansen (2015), showing fear to have a positive effect on willingness to donate.

Moreover, confirming the findings of this study, Allred and Amos (2018) argue that even if using disgusting images can evoke more empathy, it has a negative effect on donating intention, because disgust induces people to manage their mood with aversion, instead of taking action.

5.4 Combined effect of type of victim, message framing and shock images

No significant combined effect could be expected. The last two hypotheses (H4a, H4b) aimed at testing the assumption that the two different combinations would have both had a positive effect on willingness to donate, testing verbal-visual congruency in the context of child poverty, as advised for further research by Chang et al. (2009). However, given the results, these assumptions could not be tested in this study.

6. Limitations

This study presented several limitations. First of all, as the data collection had to be conducted during the quarantine imposed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the design of the study and the sampling method were negatively affected. Indeed, designing an online questionnaire for a study in the context of charitable giving risk to bias the results. First of all, social desirability may result in participants over-reporting their willingness to donate (Lee & Sargeant, 2011). Furthermore, measuring willingness to donate in a fictional scenario, where participants do not have to use their real money, can give unrealistic results.

Regarding the sampling method, convenience sampling resulted in having the questionnaire answered by random people on social media. This may have lowered participants' interest in filling the survey inaccurately and paying attention to the requests, resulting in a low completion rate and possibly lower quality results.

Even though the manipulation checks showed that participants correctly recognized the manipulations, the outcomes were not as expected in most cases. During the pre-test, the variables were tested individually, without showing the final poster design with the type of victim, message framing, and shock images combined. This might explain why message framing and type of victim did not give significant results, as there may have been suppressing variables.

7. Further research

This study aimed at investigating the effect type of victim, message framing, and shock images in charity campaigns in the context of children in a war zone. No difference in the effect of willingness to donate was found between positive and negative message framing. Further research should investigate whether including a neutral message framing in the test would give different results, in order to determine better if message framing as no effect on willingness to donate or if both negative and positive message framing have a positive impact on willingness to donate. An interesting finding of this study regards the role of disgust as a mediator between shock images and willingness to donate. Disgust resulted in lowering the positive effect of shock images on willingness to donate. Therefore, further research should investigate in a similar context how shock images can affect willingness to donate if other types of shock are implemented, using other types of offense elicitors, such as religious taboos, moral offensiveness, impropriety, vulgarity, profanity or obscenity (Dahl et al., 2003).

Moreover, as this study did not find a significant effect of type of victim on empathy, further research should investigate the role of other variables mediating between the type of victim and willingness to donate. Indeed, other variables that were not considered in this study may moderate or suppress the effect of type of victim on empathy and willingness to donate, such for example guilt, sympathy, or distress (Lee & Feeley, 2017).

8. Conclusion

This study tried to combine the findings from literature in order to find the most practical combination of a type of victim, message framing, and shock images in charity campaign posters to promote donating behavior. Several research questions were created in order to investigate this issue. Against initial expectations, only in one case, the null-hypothesis could be rejected. However, the role of shock images and mediating emotions in affecting willingness to donate is not the only means finding that can be learned from this study. This study serves as the starting point to investigate how to promote donating behavior by combining visual and textual elements. A

holistic approach in this field is still missing in the literature, but it is necessary to come up with more effective practical implications.

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10. Appendix

10.1 Pre-test

Identifiable Victim (IV)

The Identifiable Victim (IV) refers to individuals that require help. So, they involve individuals that need help and assistance because they are facing a difficult situation. They are usually presented with an accurate amount of information such as names, ages, faces, and the difficult situation they are facing (Lee & Feeley, 2018).

Statistical Victim (SV)

The Statistical Victim (SV) has similar characteristics to the Identifiable Victim, but the difference lies in the number of individuals. The SV relates to a group of people that are asking for help. So, it includes all the groups, populations, nations, or communities that need support and aid because they are facing a problematic situation. SVs are often characterized by general information about the population or group, such as common difficulty or country of origin (Lee & Feeley, 2018).

1. To what extent do you consider this message to be a statistical or identifiable victim?

“5 million children in Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance, help them with 20€”

2. To what extent do you consider this message to be a statistical or identifiable victim?

“Fatima’s family is in need of a kitchen to prepare food, donate 20€”

3. To what extent do you consider this message to be a statistical or identifiable victim?

“If not helped, Fatima won’t have food and clothes”

4. To what extent do you consider this message to be a statistical or identifiable victim?

“In the last 5 years more than 15.000 people died in the Mediterrean sea, if you do not donate, this situation will persist”

5. To what extent do you consider this message to be a statistical or identifiable victim?

“Donate 20€ to buy medical kits for 17 war-wounded people”

6. To what extent do you consider this message to be a statistical or identifiable victim?

“20€ can give a kitchen to Fatima’s family to prepare food”

7. To what extent do you consider this message to be a statistical or identifiable victim?

“Donate 20€ to provide health checks for 8 children”

8. To what extent do you consider this message to be a statistical or identifiable victim?

“With 20€ you can provide clothing and food for Fatima”

Shocking Images

1. To what extent do you perceive surprise and shock when looking at this image?



2. To what extent do you perceive surprise and shock when looking at this image?



3. To what extent do you perceive surprise and shock when looking at this image?



4. To what extent do you perceive surprise and shock when looking at this image?



5. Which image did you find to be the most surprising and shocking?

6. Which image did you find to be the least surprising and shocking?

Message Framing Positive and Negative

Positive message framing emphasizes the potential benefits brought by a donation, while negative message framing emphasizes the potential loss if an action is not taken or the problem that the donation tries to tackle.

1. To what extent do you perceive this message to be framed as positive or negative?

“Donate 20€ to provide health checks for 8 children”

2. To what extent do you perceive this message to be framed as positive or negative?

“If not helped, Fatima won’t have food and clothes”

3. To what extent do you perceive this message to be framed as positive or negative?

“With 20€ you can provide clothing and food for Fatima”

4. To what extent do you perceive this message to be framed as positive or negative?

“In the last 5 years more than 15.000 people died in the Mediterranean sea, if you do not donate, this situation will persist”

5. To what extent do you perceive this message to be framed as positive or negative?

“Donate 20€ to buy medical kits for 17 war-wounded people”

6. To what extent do you perceive this message to be framed as positive or negative?

“Fatima’s family is in need of a kitchen to prepare food, donate 20€”

7. To what extent do you perceive this message to be framed as positive or negative?

“20€ can give a kitchen to Fatima’s family to prepare food”

8. To what extent do you perceive this message to be framed as positive or negative?

“5 million children in Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance, help them with 20€”

10.2 Questionnaire

Please indicate your gender.

- ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Other
-

Please indicate your age.

Please indicate your nationality.

- ☐ Dutch
 - ☐ German
 - ☐ Italian
 - ☐ Other
-

Please indicate your primary occupation.

- ☐ Student
- ☐ Employed
- ☐ Currently unemployed
- ☐ Other

[image]

Please indicate below to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements:

While looking at the poster I felt...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
A feeling of distaste	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Empathy with the victim	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fearful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hopeful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Downhearted	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was better understanding the condition of the victim(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Surprised	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I could "get into the shoes" of the victim(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nauseated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discouraged	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The victim(s) needed help	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Astonished	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Uncomfortable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Amazed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nervous	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interested	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Disgust	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Scared	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inspired	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Revulsion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate below to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I would donate money to this cause.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is very likely that I would donate money to this cause.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would definitely donate money to this cause.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I had some money at my disposal, I would donate money to this cause.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate below to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The victim was a specific person.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The victim was representative of a larger population.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The poster displayed a positive message, emphasising potential benefits.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The poster displayed a negative message, emphasising potential loss.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The image displayed in the poster was shocking.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The image displayed in the poster was intended to be shocking.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10.3 Study log

10.3.1 Research questions

1. What are the antecedents of willingness to donate, besides the type of victim?
2. How does the type of victim affect willingness to donate?
3. How does message framing affect willingness to donate?
4. Can shock images be beneficial to increase the willingness to donate?
5. How does the type of victim affect empathy? How does empathy affect willingness to donate?
6. What emotions mediate the effect of shock images on willingness to donate?
7. How can shock be measured?

10.3.2 Selected literature criteria

The sources used for this study, mainly in the theoretical framework, are, for the most part, scientific articles. Scientific books were used in order to

retrieve information about survey design and preferred measuring scales. All sources were in the English language. The databases used to retrieve articles were, in order from the most preferred to the list preferred, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Scopus, and Google. Google was the least preferred option because of the risk of finding non-scientific or non-peer-reviewed sources.

Recent articles were preferred over older ones. As a result, the oldest article that was used in this study was published in 2016.

Concept	Related terms	Smaller terms	Broader terms
Design	Drawing, Layout, Scheme, Pattern, Picture, Arrangement, Configuration, Construction, Device	Visuals	Picture, Drawing, Layout, Pattern, Figures, Shapes.
Type of victim	Fatality, problem, misfortune, war, hunger, poverty. Calamity, individual. Group. Population, statistics, identifiability. Identifiable victim effect,	Statistical victim. Identifiable victim,	Sufferer, victim.
Willingness to donate	Prosocial behavior, philanthropy.	Donation, funding.	Charity, benevolence,
Shock images	Scare, panic, sadness, fear, surprise, horror, disgust.	Shocking photo, shocking drawing.	Picture, visuals.
Message framing	Persuasion, positive, negative, neutral, focus, construct.	Positive message framing, negative message framing, neutral message framing	Framing

Empathy	Recognition, understanding, responsiveness, comprehension	Affinity, compassion, closeness, relatableness	Emotion
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10.3.3 Conducted searches

Date	Source	Search terms and strategies	How many hits	Related terms(authors	Notes
24/02/20	Scholar.google.com	Identifiable vs statistical victims	106.000 hits (16 results seem relevant)	/	Many results. Maybe more specific search terms should be used.
24/02/20	Scopus.com	"Identifiable victim effect" charity	8 hits (4 seem relevant)	Identifiable, Victim Effect, Charitable Giving ,.	Few results, however most are relevant
25/02/20	Sciencedirect.com	"statistical victims" charity	22 hits (6 seem relevant)	Fatality, problem, misfortune, war, hunger, poverty. Calamity, individual. Group. Population, statistics, identifiability . Identifiable victim effect,	Many different results compared to the other search on Sciencedirect.com, more related to the topic of interest

12/03/20	Scholar.google.com	“Message framing” AND charity	2290 hits (3 seem relevant)	Persuasion, positive, negative, neutral, focus, construct.	/
22/03/20	Scholar.google.com	Identifiable victim empathy	41.400 hits (5 seem relevant)	Identifiable, Victim Effect, Charitable Giving , altruism, prosocial behavior.	
06/04/20	Scholar.google.com	Shock images charity advertising	31.500 hits	Sadness, fear, surprise, disgust.	/
25/04/20	Google.com	Emotions measurement scale	53.000.00 0 (3 seem relevant)	Differential emotions scale, emotional responses, Interest, enjoyment, surprise, sadness, anger, disgust, contempt, fear, shame, guilt.	/

10.3.4 References found through these searches

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10.3.5 Reflection

As can be noted from the table above and from the reference list, the criteria chosen for the online research turned out to be successful. The only research that had a bad ratio between total results and useful results was

the one conducted on Google. However, it was advantageous in order to understand the bigger picture better and get a better understanding of the topic. Indeed, the links found on Google redirected to scientific sources, which were easier to interpret and understand after having read the articles from websites and Wikipedia.

Google scholar was the source that gave access to most of the articles used in this study. However, it was sometimes inefficient compared to ScienceDirect, since many of the articles were not accessible. Furthermore, Scopus and ScienceDirect seemed to have overall articles of better quality, with more citations and peer-reviews.

A better practice for future studies would be to focus more on Google and Google scholar on the early stages of the research and move to platforms like Scopus or ScienceDirect later on, when the most effective keywords are already identified, and a direction of the research has been better defined.