

RESEARCH ARTICLE

More than just your name: Public donations drive inferences of egoistic and altruistic motives

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Email: lechapma@fiu.edu**Abstract**

The present research shows that public (vs. anonymous) donations are viewed as a sign of egoistic motives, such as wanting to impress others. In addition, such public donations also are viewed as a sign of altruistic motives, such as wanting to encourage others to donate. These perceptions inform inferences of donors' communal traits, with egoistic motives suggesting weaker communal traits, and altruistic motives suggesting stronger ones. Inferences of communal traits impact behavior, with stronger communal traits predicting greater charitable donations. In sum, public modes of giving can decrease donations (through inferences of egoistic motives and weaker communal traits) and increase donations (through inferences of altruistic motives and stronger communal traits). These effects occur in the context of \$100 and \$10 donations (Study 1) and impact real contributions of money (Study 2) and volunteer work (Study 3). Platform managers can strengthen inferences of altruistic motives by communicating that public donations can motivate others to give (Study 4). Together, these findings enhance understanding of how public forms of giving influence others to donate, which has practical implications for donation platform managers.

KEYWORDS

altruism, charitable donations, egoism, inferences, prosocial behavior

1 | INTRODUCTION

Donation and crowdfunding platforms, which enable consumers to raise and donate money, generate more than \$17.2B annually (Shepherd, 2020) with some 22% of Americans having contributed money through them (Smith, 2016). Many of these platforms give people a choice between making their donations publicly (i.e., with their names displayed) or anonymously. When given these options, most people choose to give publicly (Andreoni & Petrie, 2004).¹

Public donations connect people's identities to their charitable acts, enabling reputational benefits. For example, donors may be seen as generous, successful, and wealthy (Glazer & Konrad, 1996; Iredale et al., 2008). However, the presence of reputational benefits can suggest donors are egoistically motivated. Egoistic motives are defined as behavioral drivers which are self-serving (Hoffman, 1981). For example, volunteering in public can imply having self-centered aims (Siem & Stürmer, 2019).

Alternatively, such public donations could suggest having altruistic motives, defined as those which have the goal of improving others' welfare (Batson, 2010). In particular, people might infer that public donations reflect wanting to motivate others to contribute. Revealing identity is a form of social support that communicates alignment with the values associated with the cause (Kristofferson et al., 2014). When consumers reveal their identities, their actions

¹Consistent with Andreoni and Petrie (2004), an observational pilot study on [GoFundMe.com](https://www.gofundme.com) found that a majority of donors (71.47%) elected to donate publicly rather than anonymously. Details of this observational pilot study are located in Supporting Information S1: Appendix A.

become more persuasive (Haines et al., 2014). Indeed, people become more likely to perform desirable behaviors when they have information about who specifically performed them (Goldstein et al., 2008). Thus, people may surmise that public donors connected their identities to the donations in an effort to encourage others to join in and give.

We posited that public donations could be attributed to egoistic and altruistic motives. Both egoism and altruism have long been recognized as potential drivers of charitable behaviors (Batson et al., 1983; Cialdini et al., 1987; Hoffman, 1981; Schroeder et al., 1988). We further posited that public donations may influence the personality or individual difference characteristics attributed to donors. We focused on communal traits, which are defined as qualities that benefit others (e.g., considerateness; trustworthiness; Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011).

Communal traits are important to person perception and are detected more readily than other traits (Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011). If public donations suggest egoistic motives, that could imply that the donor is low on communal traits. By contrast, if public donations suggest altruistic motives, that may imply the donor possesses relatively strong communal traits. When people learn that a focal individual has communal qualities, they become more likely to help and cooperate with others (Gartzia & van Knippenberg, 2016). We therefore posited that perceptions of communal traits would impact decisions to donate. Specifically, seeing public donors as highly communal might increase charitable donations, which refer to money or time given to prosocial causes (Reed et al., 2016).

In three experiments, we tested whether public donations would reduce others' charitable donations through inferences of egoistic motives and weaker communal traits. We also tested whether public donations would increase others' charitable donations through inferences of altruistic motives and stronger communal traits. A fourth experiment examined whether donation platforms could strengthen perceptions of altruistic motives by displaying a message which suggests that public donations can be used to motivate others to give.

2 | CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Some past research has linked public forms of giving to increased donations. Specifically, providing information about donors' identities has been shown to increase the percentage of people who subsequently contribute (Karlán & List, 2020), the average contribution they make (Andreoni & Petrie, 2004), and the amount contributed by donors overall (Karlán & List, 2020; Van Vugt & Hardy, 2010). However, these works focused on the impacts of knowing (vs. not knowing) who donated, or knowing one's own contributions will be displayed to others. They did not focus explicitly on the choice to give publicly, and how people respond to donors who choose to publicize their gifts.

When people choose to make their donations known, it can send an ambiguous message: that they are altruistic (because they gave)

but self-serving (because they want others to know they gave). Accordingly, Berman et al. (2015) found that publicizing donations can exert mixed effects on perceptions of donors' altruism. If people do not already know about donors' gifts, they see donors as more altruistic when they talk about (vs. do not talk about) those gifts. Yet if people already know about the charitable gifts, they see donors as less altruistic when they talk about (vs. do not talk about) those gifts (Berman et al., 2015).

Overall, Berman et al. (2015) failed to find a *direct effect* of publicizing charitable gifts on others' donation likelihood. However, the results of Studies 1a and 1b confirmed that the pattern of means for donation likelihood matched those of perceived altruism (Berman et al., 2015). This suggested that seeing donors as more (less) altruistic might be related to being more (less) likely to donate.

Building on these findings, we posited that choosing to donate publicly might influence others to give *indirectly*, based on their perceptions of donors' motives. This might produce effects in more than one direction. Detecting self-serving, egoistic motives might have negative downstream effects on giving. Yet detecting other-serving, altruistic motives might have positive downstream effects. We next explain, step by step, how we expect these effects to operate.

2.1 | Public donations drive inferences of egoistic and altruistic motives

One possible outcome of public donations, but not anonymous ones, is that of reputational enhancement. When charitable gifts are attributed to donors, they may be seen as generous, wealthy, and successful (Glazer & Konrad, 1996; Iredale et al., 2008). People might surmise that donors expect their contributions to provide reputational benefits, and donate publicly to attain them.

The presence of possible reputational benefits can suggest having egoistic motives, which are defined as self-serving behavioral drivers (Hoffman, 1981). For example, volunteering in public settings can suggest having selfish aims (Siem & Stürmer, 2019). In a similar vein, we expected that people might view public donations as self-serving.

While public donations could benefit donors by enhancing their reputations, they also could exert a cost in the form of diminished privacy. Indeed, anonymity is a form of privacy that affords freedom from identification and, to some extent, social expectations (Westin, 1967). Giving publicly (vs. anonymously) therefore entails sacrificing something of value (i.e., one's privacy; Tomaino et al., 2023). Because altruism is sometimes defined as a behavior that benefits others at a cost to the person performing it (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003; West et al., 2011), the presence of this potential cost could contribute to the perception of public donors as altruistically motivated.

Fundamentally, altruistic motives are about having the goal to improve others' welfare (Batson, 2010). Altruistic motives could drive people to benefit recipients directly (e.g., by donating) or indirectly

(e.g., by urging others to donate). Indeed, donors often recognize that they themselves can only donate so much, and try to improve recipients' outcomes by encouraging others to give (Bradford, 2021).

We reasoned that both public and anonymous donations reflect a desire to benefit recipients directly, by making charitable gifts. However, public donations might also reflect a desire to benefit recipients indirectly, by rallying support for the cause. Revealing identity is a form of social support that signals alignment with the values and attitudes associated with the cause (Kristofferson et al., 2014). People are more persuaded by communications made publicly (vs. anonymously; Haines et al., 2014), and become more likely to enact desirable behaviors when they have information about who specifically performed them (Goldstein et al., 2008). Thus, people might see public donations as privacy-reducing behavior that donors chose in an effort to encourage others to give.

Stated formally, our hypotheses are:

H1a. People will infer that public (vs. anonymous) donors are driven by egoistic motives.

H1b. People will infer that public (vs. anonymous) donors are driven by altruistic motives.

To be sure, public donations could produce more than one type of outcome (e.g., reputational benefits to the donor; others being inspired to give). Accordingly, we expected people to detect the presence of both egoistic and altruistic motives. However, they might infer these motives to varying extents. We anticipated that the extent to which people attributed public donations to egoistic versus altruistic motives would predict their perceptions of donors' traits.

2.2 | Motives inform perceptions of communal traits

People's behaviors toward other people are sometimes considered diagnostic of their communal traits, defined as qualities that tend to benefit others (Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011). When people act in service of others' interests, it can suggest that they have communal traits (Cislak & Wojciszke, 2008).

Previously, we posited that people might infer public donors to be egoistically motivated. Given that people attribute intentions to dispositions (Jones & Davis, 1965), we further suggest that perceptions of egoistic motives might suggest donors are less concerned with enacting positive change in others' lives. In other words, detecting egoistic motives may fail to provide compelling evidence of a communal orientation. However, public donors also might be thought to be acting altruistically. Because altruism is about benefiting others, altruistic motives might be attributed to a strongly communal orientation. These inferences are likely to emerge, because communal traits are particularly important to person perception. They are perceived earlier and weighted

more heavily than other types of traits (Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011). We therefore hypothesized:

H2a. Inferences of egoistic motives will predict seeing donors as less communal.

H2b. Inferences of altruistic motives will predict seeing donors as more communal.

2.3 | Trait inferences and others' charitable donations

We have theorized that people's inferences about donors' motives inform their perceptions. Perceptions of communal traits are important because they impact behavior (Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011). Indeed, when one person exhibits communal qualities, people become more likely to help and cooperate with others (Gartzia & van Knippenberg, 2016). There are two possible reasons why this may occur. One, inferences of communal traits may act as a behavioral prime that drives people to behave in a similar manner (Bargh et al., 1996). Two, such inferences may act as a descriptive norm and influence behavior by communicating what others are likely to do (Cialdini et al., 1991). We therefore expected that inferences of stronger communal traits would predict greater charitable donations, defined as money or time given to prosocial causes (Reed et al., 2016).

Stated formally, we hypothesized:

H3. Seeing donors as more (vs. less) communal will predict increased (vs. decreased) charitable donations.

3 | EMPIRICAL OVERVIEW

We conducted four experiments, two of which were preregistered (Studies 1 and 2), and two of which were incentive compatible (Studies 2 and 3). It is important to note that we did not hypothesize a main effect of public versus anonymous donations on others' decisions to donate. Instead, we predicted the presence of two significant indirect effects in opposite directions. From a methodological standpoint, there is growing acknowledgment that it is not necessary to establish a main effect before testing for mediation, and that the key criterion for establishing mediation is a significant, indirect effect (Hayes, 2017; Kenny & Judd, 2014; Rucker et al., 2011; Zhao et al., 2010). Accordingly, three experimental studies tested the hypothesized dual processes. A fourth experimental study tested whether displaying a message that highlights how public donations impact others (donors themselves) strengthens the sense that public donors are altruistically (egoistically) motivated. Figure 1 provides an overview of the conceptual framework tested through these four studies.

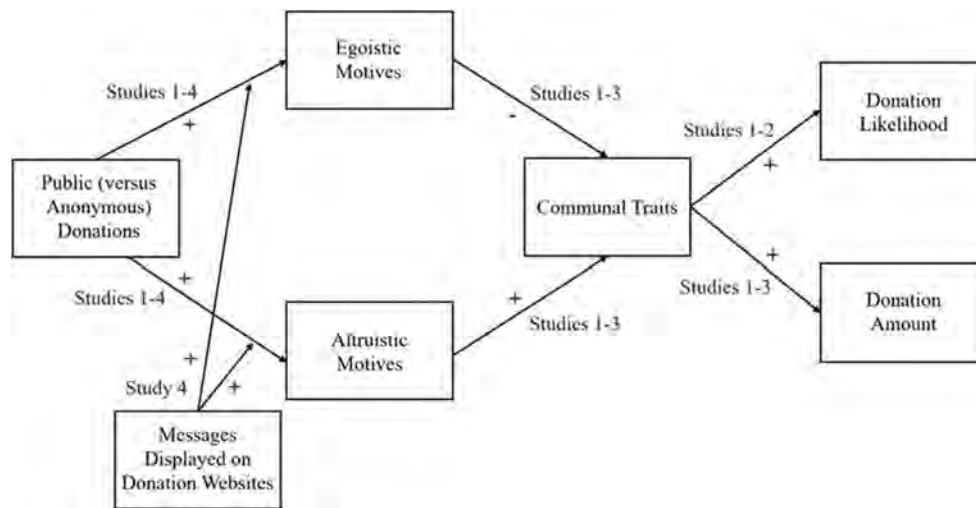


FIGURE 1 Overview of the conceptual framework and studies.

4 | STUDY 1

In this preregistered study, we sought to investigate how donating publicly versus anonymously might impact perceptions of donors' motives and traits, which in turn might impact others' charitable donations. We also investigated whether these hypothesized effects would be generalizable to relatively large and small donation amounts (i.e., \$100 and \$10; Fan et al., 2020).

4.1 | Method

We preregistered this study at <https://aspredicted.org/yf6b6.pdf> and recruited 313 United States participants through the Cloud Research platform (57.4% male, $M_{\text{age}} = 37.98$, $SD = 10.02$). The sample sizes for all studies were determined based on effect sizes found in a pretest (results of this pretest are located in Supporting Information S1: Appendix B). No response was excluded.

The study used a 2×2 between-subjects design (donation mode: public vs. anonymous; donation amount: \$100 vs. \$10). Participants were randomly assigned to a condition. They imagined that a person named Jordan visited [GoFundMe.com](https://www.gofundme.com) and decided to donate (either \$10 or \$100) to a restaurant named Sandrino. Sandrino was a local business experiencing financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants read that, "Jordan sees that the site allows people to donate anonymously or with their real names and contemplates which one to do." Participants then read that Jordan decided to donate either anonymously or with their real name.

We measured egoistic motives through the question, "To what extent did Jordan use this donation to show off or impress others?" We measured altruistic motives through the question, "To what extent did Jordan use this donation to encourage others to donate?" (1 = Not at all; 7 = An extreme amount).

Participants imagined that they were also patrons of Sandrino. They rated their donation likelihood by indicating, "How likely are you to donate to Sandrino?" (1 = Not at all; 7 = An extreme amount), and indicated on a sliding scale how much money they would donate (\$0–200).

Participants rated how strongly they agreed that Jordan possessed communal traits (i.e., sincere, considerate, conscientious, generous, agreeable, and trustworthy; 1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree; $\alpha = 0.90$). They answered two manipulation check questions: "In the scenario you read, how did the person make their donation?" (response options: Anonymously; Using their real name), and "In the scenario you read, how much money did Jordan donate?" Finally, participants answered questions measured for exploratory purposes (findings are reported in Supporting Information S1: Appendix C) and demographic questions.

4.2 | Manipulation checks

The first manipulation check question confirmed that participants in both conditions understood how the person had donated. In the public condition, 95.5% of participants correctly chose, "Using their real name," and in the anonymous condition, 97.5% correctly chose, "Anonymously" ($\chi^2 = 0.87$; $p = 0.35$, Cramer's $V = 0.05$). The second manipulation check question confirmed that participants in both conditions remembered the size of the donations they had viewed. The average amount reported by those in the \$10 condition was not significantly different from \$10 ($M = 11.90$, $SD = 23.45$; $t(152) = 1.00$, $p = 0.32$; Cohen's $d = 0.08$), and the average amount reported by those in the \$100 condition was not significantly different from \$100 ($M = 99.50$, $SD = 7.16$; $t(159) = -0.88$, $p = 0.38$, Cohen's $d = 0.07$).

4.3 | Results

4.3.1 | Egoistic motives

As predicted by H_{1a}, participants perceived public donations to be a stronger sign of egoistic motives such as wanting to show off ($M_{\text{public}} = 3.62$, $SD = 1.71$, $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 1.55$, $SD = 1.22$; $F(1, 309) = 152.84$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.33$). They also rated \$100 donations as more indicative of egoistic motives ($M_{\$100} = 2.76$, $SD = 1.93$, $M_{\$10} = 2.40$, $SD = 1.65$; $F(1, 309) = 4.56$, $p = 0.03$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$). There was no interaction between the two factors ($F(1, 309) = 0.01$, $p = 0.92$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$).

4.3.2 | Altruistic motives

As predicted by H_{1b}, participants in the public condition agreed more strongly that public donors had altruistic motives ($M_{\text{public}} = 4.82$, $SD = 1.37$, $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 4.19$, $SD = 1.59$; $F(1, 309) = 14.11$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$). Participants in the \$100 condition also perceived stronger altruistic motives ($M_{\$100} = 4.67$, $SD = 1.45$, $M_{\$10} = 4.33$, $SD = 1.56$; $F(1, 309) = 4.00$, $p = 0.046$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$). The factors did not interact ($F(1, 309) = 0.27$, $p = 0.61$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$).

4.3.3 | Communal traits

Though not hypothesized, participants in the anonymous condition agreed more strongly that the donor possessed communal traits ($M_{\text{public}} = 5.46$, $SD = 0.93$, $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 5.70$, $SD = 0.88$; $F(1, 309) = 5.61$, $p = 0.02$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$). Donation amount did not impact perceptions of communal traits ($M_{\$100} = 5.65$, $SD = 0.83$, $M_{\$10} = 5.50$, $SD = 0.99$; $F(1, 309) = 2.20$, $p = 0.14$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$).

4.3.4 | Charitable donations

We neither predicted nor found evidence of direct effects on donation likelihood. Results of a two-way ANOVA showed no direct

effect of public versus anonymous donations ($M_{\text{public}} = 3.61$, $SD = 1.76$, $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 3.92$, $SD = 1.80$; $F(1, 309) = 2.43$, $p = 0.12$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$) or of donation amount ($M_{\$100} = 3.71$, $SD = 1.72$, $M_{\$10} = 3.82$, $SD = 1.84$; $F(1, 309) = 0.26$, $p = 0.61$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$). The factors did not interact ($F(1, 309) = 1.41$, $p = 0.24$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$).

We square-root transformed donation dollars because they were highly skewed (skewness = 2.79 > 1.96, the pre-registered threshold). There was no direct effect of the public versus anonymous conditions on this donation outcome ($M_{\text{public}} = 3.58$, $SD = 3.00$, $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 3.93$, $SD = 2.86$; $F(1, 309) = 1.34$, $p = 0.25$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$). There was a direct effect of the observed donation amount ($M_{\$100} = 4.69$, $SD = 3.12$, $M_{\$10} = 2.78$, $SD = 2.36$; $F(1, 309) = 37.13$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.11$). There was no interaction ($F(1, 309) = 0.23$, $p = 0.63$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$).

4.3.5 | Mediation analyses

Our preregistration stated that we would conduct a moderated mediation analysis. Because donation mode and donation amount did not interact to influence inferences of donors' motives, we did not find a moderated mediation pattern (see Supporting Information S1: Appendix C).

Thus, we conducted two serial mediation analyses, one with donation likelihood as the dependent variable, and one with transformed donation dollar amount as the dependent variable. Both analyses used PROCESS Model 80 with 10,000 bootstrapped samples (Hayes, 2017). These analyses revealed parallel, sequential mediation (Figure 2). To the extent that participants attributed public donations (0 = *Anonymous*; 1 = *Public*) to egoistic motives, they saw public donors as less communal, which, in turn, led to lower donation likelihood (indirect effect = -0.14, 95% confidence interval [95% CI]: [-0.25, -0.06]) and amounts (indirect effect = -0.20, 95% CI: [-0.36, -0.07]). To the extent participants attributed public donations to altruistic motives, they saw public donors as more communal, which led to greater donation likelihood (indirect effect = 0.04, 95% CI: [0.01, 0.07]) and amounts (indirect effect = 0.05, 95% CI: [0.01, 0.10]).

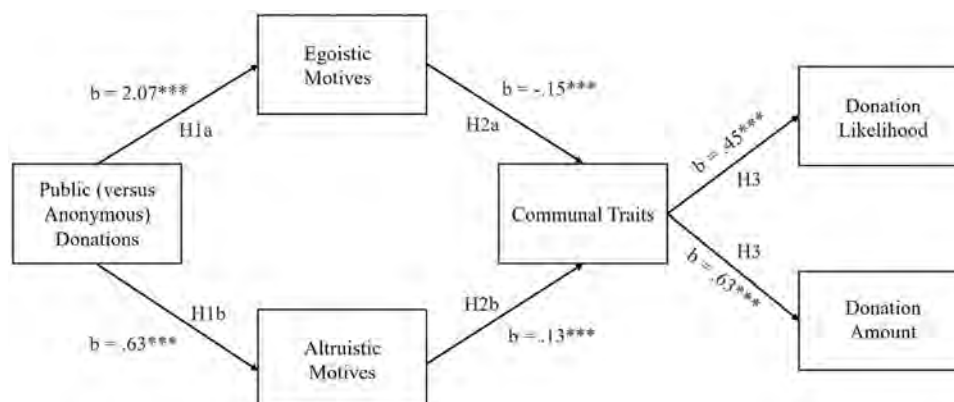


FIGURE 2 Study 1 mediation analyses. Public = 1; Anonymous = 0. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

We conducted pairwise contrasts of indirect effects to determine if there were significant differences in the indirect effect sizes. This analysis revealed differences for both donation likelihood (indirect effect = 0.11, 95% CI: [0.03, 0.20]) and amount (indirect effect = 0.15, 95% CI: [0.04, 0.30]). Hence while both indirect effects were significant, the negative paths were significantly larger than the positive ones.

4.4 | Discussion

Study 1 provided initial evidence for the proposition that public donations drive dual inferences, which exert significant, indirect effects in opposite directions. Inferring public donations to be stemming from egoistic motives weakens perceptions of donors' communal traits. This, in turn, predicts smaller donation likelihood and amounts. Inferring public donors to be driven by altruistic motives strengthens perceptions of donors' communal traits. This, in turn, predicts greater donation likelihood and amounts.

This study also demonstrated that the hypothesized effects occur in response to donations of different sizes. While it might be expected that only large, public donations drive inferences of egoistic or altruistic motives, results did not support those hypotheses.

5 | STUDY 2

This preregistered study had four objectives. One, we sought to replicate the effects found in Study 1. Two, given that real behaviors would enhance the validity of our findings (Baumeister et al., 2007), we measured real donations instead of behavioral intentions. Three, we sought to investigate if other perceptions of donors (e.g., extroversion) might be influenced by public versus anonymous donations. Four, we tested whether revealing or concealing another aspect of donations (i.e., their amounts) might drive the hypothesized dual processes. Because observability is known to encourage desirable behavior (Kraft-Todd et al., 2015), it is possible that making any aspect of donations observable (i.e., their amounts) would encourage others to contribute. However, past research shows that revealing identity is a form of social support (Kristofferson et al., 2014) that is particularly effective in generating social influence. For example, people are better able to persuade others when they post messages with their names (vs. anonymously; Haines et al., 2014). We therefore expected that the hypothesized dual effects would be specific to consumers who donated with their names (vs. anonymously), and would not be observed in response to disclosing other types of donation-related information.

5.1 | Method

We preregistered this study at <https://aspredicted.org/6mr45.pdf> and collected 362 responses from United States participants on the

Prolific platform. Our preregistration stated that we would collect 292 responses, and we exceeded this number intentionally, since we also had preregistered that we would exclude any participants who failed one or more manipulation check questions. Indeed, 78 participants failed one or more questions, leaving a usable sample of 284 participants (55.6% male, $M_{\text{age}} = 37.07$, $SD = 11.49$).

At the beginning of the survey, all participants read that they would receive a \$1.00 bonus, which they would later have an opportunity to spend. The amount of the bonus would thus depend on how much (if any) they elected to spend. Next, participants were assigned randomly to one of four conditions, as the study used a 2×2 between-subjects design (donation mode: public vs. anonymous; donation amount: not displayed vs. displayed).

We informed participants that the study was being conducted in collaboration with a charitable organization called Child Help Foundation (Xu et al., 2022), chosen because we expected that donations to children would have wide, general appeal. Participants in all conditions were informed that a person named Jordan was in the process of making a donation of \$20 to Child Help Foundation. All participants read that, "Jordan sees that the site allows people to donate anonymously or with their real names and contemplates which one to do. In the end, they decide to donate with their real name (anonymously)."

Participants viewed a picture of the donation, which either showed the amount of the donation (\$20) or did not (see Supporting Information S1: Appendix D for images of stimuli). They then rated the donor's egoistic and altruistic motives through the same questions used in Study 1.

At this point, participants were reminded that the study was being conducted in collaboration with The Child Help Foundation, and that the foundation was seeking donations to benefit children in need. Participants read, "You can help by donating part or all of your \$1.00 bonus to the charity. Please select the amount (from \$0.00 to \$1.00) that you would like to give." Participants used a sliding scale from \$0.00 to \$1.00, in \$.10 increments, to indicate the amount of their donation. Participants rated how strongly they agreed that Jordan possessed communal traits (i.e., sincere, considerate, conscientious, generous, agreeable, and trustworthy; $\alpha = 0.90$).

We included a number of questions for exploratory purposes. Participants indicated to what extent the donor was intrinsically motivated to support the cause, and to what extent the donation was selflessly motivated (1 = Not at all; 7 = An extreme amount). We measured perceptions of extroversion and various negative traits (narcissistic, vain, honest (reverse-coded), insecure, self-centered, neurotic and materialistic; 1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree). In a factor analysis, the negative traits loaded on a single factor and were therefore averaged ($\alpha = 0.90$). Participants answered three manipulation check questions: "In the scenario you read, how did the person make their donation?" (response options: Anonymously; Using their real name); "In the image of the donation you viewed, was the amount of the donation displayed?" (response options: Yes, it was displayed; No, it was not displayed); and "In the scenario you read, how much money did Jordan donate?" (response options: \$0, \$10,

\$20, Other (enter amount)). Last, participants answered demographic questions.

5.2 | Results

5.2.1 | Egoistic motives

As predicted by H_{1a}, participants thought public donations (vs. anonymous ones) were a sign of egoistic motives ($M_{\text{public}} = 3.52$, $SD = 1.56$, $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 1.40$, $SD = 0.95$; $F(1, 280) = 187.66$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.40$). Displaying the donation amount, however, did not drive stronger inferences of egoistic motives ($M_{\text{displayed}} = 2.43$, $SD = 1.71$, $M_{\text{not displayed}} = 2.60$, $SD = 1.64$; $F(1, 280) = 0.52$, $p = 0.47$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$). The factors did not interact ($F(1, 280) = 1.34$, $p = 0.25$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$).

5.2.2 | Altruistic motives

As predicted by H_{1b}, participants in the public condition agreed more strongly that donors had altruistic motives ($M_{\text{public}} = 4.36$, $SD = 1.42$, $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 3.90$, $SD = 1.55$; $F(1, 280) = 7.14$, $p = 0.008$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$). Not displaying (vs. displaying) the donation amount did not significantly influence inferences of altruistic motives ($M_{\text{displayed}} = 4.26$, $SD = 1.48$, $M_{\text{not displayed}} = 3.98$, $SD = 1.51$; $F(1, 280) = 2.68$, $p = 0.10$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$). The two factors did not interact ($F(1, 280) = 0.12$, $p = 0.73$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$).

5.2.3 | Mediation analyses

Since donation mode and donation amount being displayed did not interact to influence inferences of donors' motives, there was not a moderated mediation pattern (results are located in Supporting Information S1: Appendix D). The preregistration had specified that if moderated mediation was not found, we would conduct serial mediation analyses (Figure 3).

A mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 80 (Hayes, 2017) showed that public donations resulted in lower rates of donation (i.e.,

fewer people gave) through stronger perceptions of egoistic motives and, in turn, seeing donors as less communal (indirect effect = -0.18 , 95% CI: $[-0.37, -0.04]$). At the same time, public donations drove higher rates of donation through seeing donors as having altruistic motives and being highly communal (indirect effect = 0.03 , 95% CI: $[0.003, 0.07]$). Pairwise contrasts of indirect effects revealed the negative effect to be significantly larger than the positive one (indirect effect = 0.16 , 95% CI: $[0.04, 0.33]$).

A second analysis used donation amount as the dependent variable. Donation amount was not square-root transformed, as the skewness of $1.25 < 1.96$, the preregistered threshold. It revealed a significant, negative indirect effect of public donations (indirect effect = -0.03 , 95% CI: $[-0.06, -0.005]$). It also revealed a significant, positive indirect effect (indirect effect = 0.004 , 95% CI: $[0.0003, 0.01]$). Pairwise contrasts of indirect effects showed that the negative effect was significantly larger than the positive one (indirect effect = 0.02 , 95% CI: $[0.005, 0.05]$).

5.3 | Exploratory analyses

Exploratory analyses revealed that anonymous (vs. public) donors were seen as having stronger intrinsic motivation ($M_{\text{public}} = 5.19$, $SD = 1.03$, $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 5.64$, $SD = 1.29$; $F(1, 280) = 10.04$, $p = 0.002$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$), and being more selflessly motivated ($M_{\text{public}} = 4.95$, $SD = 1.30$, $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 5.99$, $SD = 1.31$; $F(1, 280) = 44.29$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.14$). Public donors were seen as more extroverted ($M_{\text{public}} = 4.41$, $SD = 1.17$, $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 3.82$, $SD = 1.03$; $F(1, 280) = 22.25$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$). They were also seen as having more negative traits ($M_{\text{public}} = 2.65$, $SD = 1.09$, $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 2.17$, $SD = 0.95$; $F(1, 280) = 14.30$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$).

5.4 | Discussion

Study 2 again showed that public donations drive dual inferences of donors' motives. Moreover, it revealed that those inferences have significant downstream effects on actual charitable donations. To the

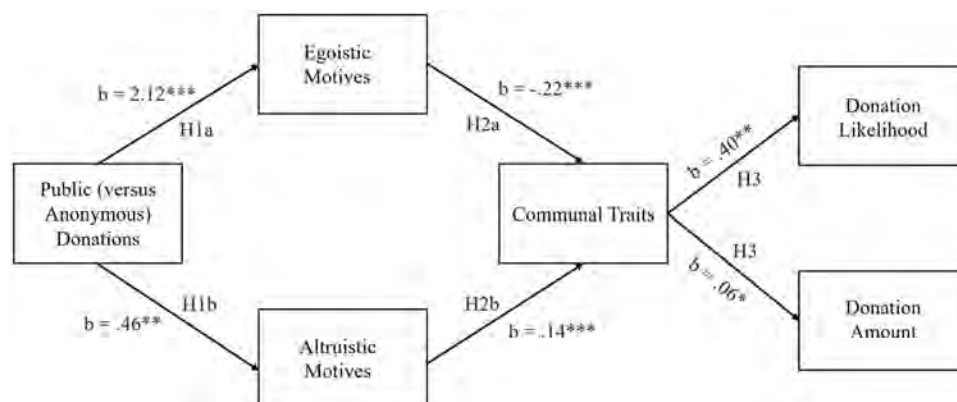


FIGURE 3 Study 2 mediation analysis. Public = 1; Anonymous = 0. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

extent that people infer public donors to have egoistic motives, they become less likely to donate, and give less money. These effects are mediated by perceptions of public donors being less communal. Yet to the extent that people infer public donors to possess altruistic motives, they become more likely to donate, and donate more money, effects that operate through perceptions of donors being more communal. We had considered that making the donation amount visible (vs. not) might influence the proposed dual process. For example, making the amount not visible might attenuate perceptions of egoistic motives. However, results did not support these propositions.

Results of exploratory analyses showed that public donations inform a variety of perceptions about donors. Overall, anonymous donors are seen as more intrinsically and selflessly motivated. Perhaps due to their willingness to make themselves known, public donors are seen as more extroverted. However, they are also thought to have negative traits. This finding aligns with research showing that publicizing one's good deeds can undermine the positive image one may be trying to project (Berman et al., 2015).

6 | STUDY 3

This study aimed to replicate the conceptual model using fuller and previously validated measures of our constructs. We also sought to clarify whether the altruistic motives public donors are thought to possess relate to observers, beneficiaries, or both. We have theorized and demonstrated in the first two studies that people infer public donors are trying to help recipients indirectly, by motivating others (i.e., observers) to donate. Yet it is also possible that public donors are thought to be especially concerned about beneficiaries. The present study tested this possibility.

In this incentive-compatible study, we used a new measure of charitable donations: time spent volunteering. Specifically, we offered participants the ability to raise money for charity by solving CAPTCHAs, or visually obscured alphanumeric strings. Solving CAPTCHAs has been used in past research as a measure of willingness to complete work (Srna et al., 2022).

The present study also included a baseline condition in which participants did not view a donation made by a fellow consumer. This inclusion of a true control condition allowed us to assess how viewing a public or anonymous donation influences the willingness to contribute, relative to seeing no other donation.

6.1 | Method

We collected 283 responses from across the subject pools of two United States universities. Of these participants, 281 completed the survey including demographics (61.6% female, $M_{age} = 21.74$, $SD = 4.79$). In Study 2, we excluded responses from those who failed manipulation check questions. However, the conclusions of the study did not change when we analyzed the full data set (Supporting Information S1: Appendix D). For this reason, all responses in the present study were retained and analyzed.

At the start of the survey, participants read that the study was being conducted in collaboration with UNICEF. Participants were informed that the organization was currently conducting an online fundraising event.

At this point, participants were randomly assigned to view a donation or no previous donation (i.e., the baseline condition). Those in the baseline condition continued to the donation decision section of the survey, while those in the public and anonymous conditions read that they would evaluate a recent online donation made to UNICEF. Specifically, they were informed that a person named Morgan decided to donate \$5 and contemplated whether to do so anonymously or with their real name. Participants then read that Morgan decided to donate either with their real name or anonymously. Accordingly, a donation was displayed which either showed Morgan's name or the tag anonymous (see Supporting Information S1: Appendix E for images of stimuli).

Three items measured egoistic motives: "To what extent was Morgan driven by... Concern for his/herself; Self-oriented motives; Egoism" (1 = Not at all; 7 = An extreme amount; $\alpha = 0.88$; adapted from Barnett et al., 2000). Three items were used to measure altruistic motives related to influencing observers: "To what extent was Morgan trying to... Start a chain reaction of giving; Raise awareness for the cause; Generate compassion toward people in need" (1 = Not at all; 7 = An extreme amount; $\alpha = 0.75$; adapted from Konrath & Handy, 2018; and Silver & Small, 2024). Three items measured altruistic motives related to beneficiaries: "To what extent was Morgan driven by... Concern for others; A focus on others' welfare; Empathy (1 = Not at all; 7 = An extreme amount; $\alpha = 0.92$; adapted from Barnett et al., 2000)."

Then participants made a donation decision. Specifically, they read, "We are helping raise money for UNICEF by donating \$0.05 for every CAPTCHA that students solve." An example of a CAPTCHA was displayed. Participants used a sliding scale from 0 to 10 in 1-unit increments to indicate how many CAPTCHAs they were willing to complete.

Participants in the public and anonymous conditions rated how strongly they agreed that Morgan possessed communal traits (i.e., considerate; fair; honest; reliable; trustworthy; just; affectionate; caring; empathetic; friendly; helpful; warm; $\alpha = 0.96$; Abele et al., 2016). All participants answered a manipulation check question: "Earlier in this survey, did you read about or see another person's donation to UNICEF?" (response options: Yes; No). Those who responded affirmatively answered a second manipulation check question: "In the scenario you read, how did the person make their donation?" (response options; Anonymously; Using their real name). Participants answered demographic questions, then solved the number of CAPTCHAs they had volunteered to complete.

6.2 | Manipulation checks

About half of those who viewed a donation reported that they had read about or seen another person's donation to UNICEF. This was true in both the public condition (40.4% responded affirmatively) and the anonymous condition (50.0% responded affirmatively; $\chi^2 = 1.74$; $p = 0.19$, Cramer's $V = 0.10$). The lack of a significant difference suggests the

manipulation did not differ in its effectiveness across those two conditions. As expected, significantly fewer participants in the baseline condition responded affirmatively (20.2%) compared to the other two conditions combined (45.2%; $\chi^2 = 16.83$; $p < 0.001$, Cramer's $V = 0.24$). The second manipulation check question indicated that the manipulation was effective across both conditions: 84.2% of those in the public condition correctly chose "Using their real name," and 91.5% in the anonymous condition correctly chose "Anonymously" ($\chi^2 = 1.07$; $p = 0.30$, Cramer's $V = 0.11$). Such rates of identification are considered acceptable, with similar rates having been documented even when checks are conducted immediately after the manipulation (Kane & Barabas, 2019). What is most important is that rates of identification do not vary significantly between groups.

6.3 | Results

6.3.1 | Egoistic motives

As predicted by H_{1a} , participants thought public donations (vs. anonymous ones) were a sign of egoistic motives. Specifically, they rated public donors as being more driven by concern for the self, self-oriented motives, and egoism ($M_{\text{public}} = 3.27$, $SD = 1.68$, $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 2.71$, $SD = 1.37$; $F(1, 186) = 6.25$, $p = 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$).

6.3.2 | Altruistic motives

Participants in the public (vs. anonymous) condition agreed more strongly that donors had altruistic motives (H_{1b}) related to influencing observers. That is, participants in the public condition thought donors were using the donation to start a chain reaction of giving, raise awareness for the cause, and generate compassion toward people in need ($M_{\text{public}} = 4.74$, $SD = 1.17$, $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 4.39$, $SD = 1.20$; $F(1, 186) = 4.13$, $p = 0.04$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$). They did not detect stronger altruistic motives related to beneficiaries. That is, participants saw both public and anonymous donors as driven by concern for others, a focus on others' welfare, and empathy ($M_{\text{public}} = 5.18$, $SD = 1.26$, $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 5.20$, $SD = 1.26$; $F(1, 186) = 0.01$, $p = 0.94$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$).

6.3.3 | Communal traits

Results did not show evidence of a direct effect of public (vs. anonymous) donations on perceptions of donors' communal traits ($M_{\text{public}} = 5.01$, $SD = 1.18$, $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 5.02$, $SD = 1.09$; $F(1, 186) = 0.01$, $p = 0.93$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$).

6.3.4 | Solving CAPTCHAs

Across the three conditions, nearly all participants were willing to complete at least one CAPTCHA: 93.6% in the public condition;

94.7% in the anonymous condition; and 95.7% in the baseline condition ($\chi^2 = 0.42$, $p = 0.81$, Cramer's $V = 0.04$). There was no difference by condition, either, on the number of CAPTCHAs participants agreed to complete ($M_{\text{public}} = 7.23$, $SD = 3.54$, $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 7.35$, $SD = 3.46$, $M_{\text{baseline}} = 6.35$, $SD = 3.99$; $F(2, 279) = 2.09$, $p = 0.13$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$). We next compared those in the public and anonymous conditions (combined) to those in the baseline condition. Those in the baseline condition completed significantly fewer CAPTCHAs ($M_{\text{public+anonymous}} = 7.29$, $SD = 3.49$, $M_{\text{baseline}} = 6.35$, $SD = 3.99$; $F(1, 280) = 4.14$, $p = 0.04$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$).

6.3.5 | Gender differences

In this study, there were somewhat more women in the anonymous condition (64.9%) than in the public one (60.6%; $\chi^2 = 0.36$; $p = 0.55$, Cramer's $V = 0.04$). Consistent with findings that show gender can influence perceptions of communal traits (Hentschel et al., 2019), we found that gender influenced perceptions of communal traits. It also significantly influenced donation behavior: a greater proportion of females volunteered to solve at least one CAPTCHA (97.7% of females vs. 90.7% of males; $\chi^2 = 6.78$; $p = 0.009$, Cramer's $V = 0.16$) and females solved, on average, more CAPTCHAs ($M_{\text{female}} = 7.70$, $SD = 3.33$, $M_{\text{male}} = 5.89$, $SD = 3.91$, $F(1, 279) = 17.14$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.06$). To control for these differences, gender was included as a covariate in the subsequent mediation analyses.

6.3.6 | Mediation analyses

Both analyses used PROCESS Model 80 with 10,000 bootstrapped samples. We first examined the effect of public vs. anonymous donations on the decision to donate (vs. not). Results did not show any evidence that public donations indirectly influenced the decision to donate either through perceptions of egoistic motives and inferences of the donors' communal traits (indirect effect = 0.01, 95% CI: [-0.04, 0.07]), or through perceptions of altruistic motives and inferences of donors' communal traits (indirect effect = -0.04, 95% CI: [-0.21, 0.13]). This may have been because nearly all participants across the conditions volunteered to solve at least one CAPTCHA.

We next examined whether public donations would exert indirect effects on the number of CAPTCHAs solved. A mediation analysis revealed that to the extent people thought public donors had egoistic motives, they saw them as being less communal, and in turn solved fewer CAPTCHAs (indirect effect = -0.04, 95% CI: [-0.10, -0.001]). Yet to the extent people thought public donors had altruistic motives, they believed them to be more communal, and volunteered to solve more CAPTCHAs (indirect effect = 0.12, 95% CI: [0.0004, 0.33]; Figure 4). Gender significantly influenced the perception of communal traits ($b = 0.28$, $SE = 0.14$; $p = 0.04$). It also influenced the number of CAPTCHAs solved ($b = -1.98$, $SE = 0.51$; $p = 0.0002$).

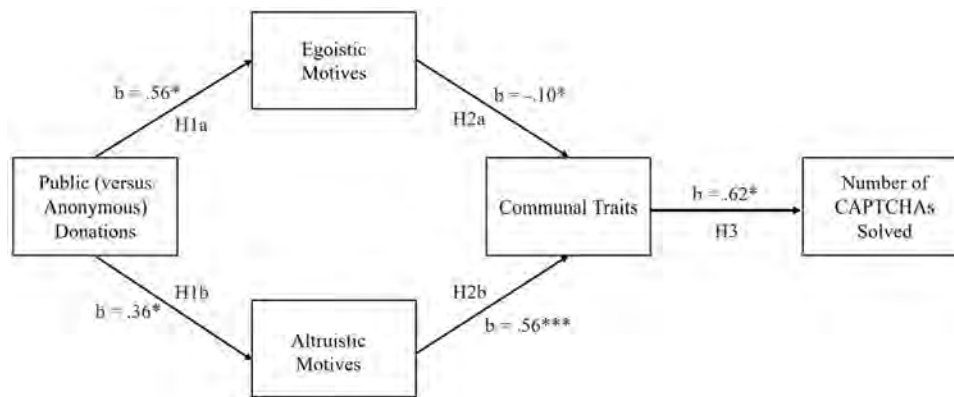


FIGURE 4 Study 3 mediation analysis. Public = 1; Anonymous = 0. Covariate: Gender. *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

We conducted pairwise contrasts of indirect effects. There was no evidence that the indirect effects were of different sizes, as the 95% confidence interval included zero (indirect effect = 0.09, 95% CI: [-0.04, 0.29]).

6.4 | Discussion

This incentive-compatible study replicated the proposed conceptual model using fuller, validated measures of the proposed constructs. It used a new measure of charitable donations—volunteer work—thus showing that public donations can influence how much time and effort people contribute.

In this study, the negative indirect effect of public donations on subsequent contributions was not shown to be larger than the positive one. This may be due to the type of donation solicited (i.e., volunteer work) or the population sampled. These results suggest that the positive downstream impacts of perceived altruistic motives may be, in some cases, about as impactful as the negative downstream impacts of perceived egoistic motives.

Results also demonstrated that displaying another person's donation, either publicly or anonymously, increases the amount people give relative to not seeing another donation. This clarifies that while public donations can sometimes deter subsequent donations, donation platforms should continue to display past donations rather than not showing them at all.

7 | STUDY 4

At this point, three studies have demonstrated that perceptions of donors' motives have downstream effects on others' donations. Thus, any intervention that influences the perception of these motives could impact whether and how much others give. We posited that donation websites might be able to influence inferences of donors' motives through the messages they display. Messages suggesting that public donations can be used to showcase donors' generosity might strengthen perceptions of egoistic motives. In contrast,

messages suggesting that public donations can be used to encourage others to give might strengthen perceptions of altruistic motives.

7.1 | Method

We collected responses from 350 United States participants (52.6% male; $M_{age} = 40.60$, $SD = 14.01$) recruited on the Prolific platform. No response was excluded.

The study took a 2 (donation type: public vs. anonymous) \times 2 (message type: egoistic vs. altruistic) between-subjects design. Participants first read about Feeding America, a charitable organization that helps bring food to people in need. According to the scenario, Feeding America was conducting an online fundraising event, and a person named Morgan decided to donate \$5. Morgan faced a decision about whether to display their name alongside their donation or not.

Participants viewed an image of the checkboxes which enabled donors to decide how their donation would be displayed. In the egoistic message condition, the option to donate publicly had an information bubble alongside it with the text, "You can show your generosity by displaying your name publicly" (Figure 5). In the altruistic message condition, the option to donate publicly had an information bubble alongside it with the text, "You can motivate others to donate by displaying your name publicly" (Figure 6).

On the next screen, participants in the public condition read that, "In the end, Morgan decides to check the box labeled, "Display my donation publicly on the fundraiser." "Those in the anonymous condition read that Morgan decides to check the box, "Don't display my name publicly on the fundraiser." In both conditions, an image of the donation was displayed (images from the survey are located in Supporting Information S1: Appendix F).

Participants rated perceptions of egoistic motives through the same items used in Study 3. They provided perceptions of altruistic motives by indicating the extent the donor was trying to "Start a chain reaction of giving," "Raise awareness for the cause," and "Generate compassion for people in need" (1 = Not at all; 7 = An extreme amount; $\alpha = 0.84$). Participants answered a manipulation



FIGURE 5 Message suggesting egoistic motives.



FIGURE 6 Message suggesting altruistic motives.

check question, “In the scenario you read, how did the person make their donation?” (response options: With their name displayed; Without their name displayed (labeled as “Anonymous”)), and provided their age and gender.

7.2 | Manipulation check

In both conditions, nearly all participants recalled whether the donation they viewed was made publicly or anonymously. Of those in the public condition, 96.6% correctly selected that the donation was made, “With their name displayed.” Of those in the anonymous condition, 96.6% correctly selected, “Without their name displayed (labeled as “Anonymous”)” ($\chi^2 = 1.00$; $p = 1.00$, Cramer's $V = 0.00$).

7.3 | Results

Egoistic motives. A two-way ANOVA of donation type (public vs. anonymous) and message type (egoistic vs. altruistic) on perceptions of egoistic motives revealed a direct effect of donation type ($M_{\text{public}} = 2.86$, $SD = 1.56$; $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 1.98$, $SD = 1.34$; $F(1, 346) = 32.42$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$). There was no effect of message type ($M_{\text{egoistic}} = 2.46$, $SD = 1.57$; $M_{\text{altruistic}} = 2.39$, $SD = 1.47$; $F(1, 346) = 0.05$; $p = 0.82$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$). There was a significant interaction between the two factors ($F(1, 346) = 6.54$, $p = 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$).

Post-hoc contrast analyses showed that people viewed public (vs. anonymous) donors as having stronger egoistic motives. This was observed both in the egoistic message condition ($M_{\text{public}} = 3.07$,

$SD = 1.64$; $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 1.79$, $SD = 1.17$; $F(1, 346) = 34.24$; $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$) and altruistic message condition ($M_{\text{public}} = 2.64$, $SD = 1.44$; $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 2.15$, $SD = 1.47$; $F(1, 346) = 4.89$; $p = 0.03$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$).

Yet within the public condition, participants perceived stronger egoistic motives when the egoistic (vs. altruistic) message was displayed ($F(1, 346) = 3.87$; $p = 0.05$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$). Within the anonymous condition, the message displayed did not significantly impact perceptions of egoistic motives ($F(1, 346) = 2.72$; $p = 0.10$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$).

Altruistic motives. A two-way ANOVA revealed direct effects of donation type ($M_{\text{public}} = 4.80$, $SD = 1.35$; $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 3.92$, $SD = 1.53$; $F(1, 346) = 35.69$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$) and message type ($M_{\text{egoistic}} = 4.18$, $SD = 1.46$; $M_{\text{altruistic}} = 4.53$, $SD = 1.54$; $F(1, 346) = 6.72$; $p = 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$) on perceptions of altruistic motives. There was also a significant interaction ($F(1, 346) = 8.70$, $p = 0.003$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$).

Post-hoc contrast analyses showed that in both message conditions, public (vs. anonymous) donors were thought to have stronger altruistic motives. That is, this effect was observed both in the altruistic message condition ($M_{\text{public}} = 5.24$, $SD = 1.16$; $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 3.89$, $SD = 1.56$; $F(1, 346) = 39.60$; $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.10$) and in the egoistic message condition ($M_{\text{public}} = 4.40$, $SD = 1.40$; $M_{\text{anonymous}} = 3.94$, $SD = 1.50$; $F(1, 346) = 4.60$; $p = 0.03$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$).

Yet within the public condition, altruistic motives were more strongly detected when people saw the altruistic message vs. the egoistic message ($F(1, 346) = 15.35$; $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$). Within the anonymous condition, the message did not impact perceptions of altruistic motives ($F(1, 346) = 0.06$; $p = 0.80$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$). This shows that donation platforms can strengthen perceptions of public donors' altruistic motives through the messages they display.

8 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present research demonstrates that public donations drive competing inferences of donors' motives. Public donations suggest that donors are egoistically motivated, and are using their donations to show off and impress. They also suggest donors are altruistic, and are trying to rally support for the cause. These impressions emerge in response to donations large and small (Study 1), regardless of whether the amount is displayed or not (Study 2). They exert a downstream influence on donation intentions (Study 1), real monetary donations (Study 2), and time spent volunteering (Study 3). While public donations deter others from giving through inferences that donors are egoistically motivated and less communal, they also induce others to give through inferences that donors are altruistically motivated and highly communal.

In Studies 1–2, the size of the negative indirect effect was larger than the positive one. This suggests that inferences of egoistic motives can be particularly detrimental to subsequent donation behavior. It would be important for managers to minimize such negative inferences or encourage more positive ones. Study 4 demonstrated that inferences of altruistic motives can be strengthened through the messages displayed on donation platforms.

The present research also found that viewing larger donations (i.e., \$100 vs. \$10) strengthened perceptions of egoistic and altruistic motives. Given that these inferred motives have downstream impacts on charitable donations, it may be especially important to convey the presence of altruistic motives in contexts in which larger donations are made.

8.1 | Contributions to theory

By elucidating how public donations can spur and deter subsequent donations, the present research enhances theoretical understanding of how donors influence one another to give (Berman et al., 2015; Chapman et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2023). Past work often has highlighted consumers' cynicism regarding others' prosocial behaviors (Critcher & Dunning, 2011; Newman & Cain, 2014) and framed the sharing of information about one's donations negatively (e.g., as bragging; Berman et al., 2015). The present research provides a more balanced view, as it demonstrates that public donations support both positive and negative inferences. The positive inferences are especially important to understand, as they indirectly increase others' charitable donations.

8.2 | Contributions to practice

Substantively, this research is relevant to donation platforms, as they may wish to understand how features on their websites influence potential donors' perceptions and decisions to give (Ma et al., 2023). Managers may be able to develop additional interventions to strengthen positive inferential processes, thus

harnessing the power of public donations to indirectly increase subsequent gifts. Study 4 showed that displaying a message such as, "You can motivate others to donate by displaying your name publicly" strengthens inferences of altruistic motives. However, such a message does not attenuate inferences of egoistic motives. A posttest showed that inferences of egoistic motives can be attenuated when people donate in the name of another (see Supporting Information S1: Appendix G).

Some donation platforms already recognize that public support from donors can influence others to give. For example, fundraisers on [DonorsChoose.org](https://www.donorschoose.org) display the message, "Give this project a boost! A chain reaction of support starts with one share" (Donors Choose, n.d.). Under this message, people can click on links that enable sharing through Facebook or email. Such sharing is usually public, as communicating through Facebook and email normally entails revealing one's identity. In this way, [DonorsChoose.org](https://www.donorschoose.org) is encouraging donors to connect their identities with the cause as a means of raising support.

8.3 | Limitations and future research

One limitation of our study is that we examined consumers' inferences regarding a single donation. In real life, consumers often observe patterns of donations, which could influence their impressions regarding a focal donor. Future research should therefore investigate how observing a sequence of donations could influence perceptions of donors' motives. Another question that remains is whether there are long-term consequences stemming from inferences of donors' motives. Future research could investigate, for example, how these perceptions influence responsiveness to the focal charity's subsequent solicitations.

Evidence from three experimental studies provided consistent evidence that inferences of communal traits mediated the relationship between perceptions of donors' motives and charitable behaviors. This is consistent with past research showing that the presence of communal traits encourages prosocial behavior toward others (Gartzia & van Knippenberg, 2016). However, the reasons why communal traits impact prosocial behavior have not been yet disentangled. Communal traits might act as a behavioral prime that encourages others to follow suit (Bargh et al., 1996). Alternatively, they might influence what others do by creating descriptive norms (Cialdini et al., 1991). Future research could seek to clarify why perceptions of communal traits increase charitable donations.

We sought to establish generalizability by sampling different populations (i.e., college students; online community samples) but acknowledge that these groups may differ from the general population. Further, in Studies 2–3, a large percentage of participants failed the manipulation checks. Future research could seek to sample other participants (e.g., those outside of the United States) to more firmly establish the generalizability and replicability of the documented effects.

9 | CONCLUSION

Public donations drive competing inferences of donors' motives. Inferences of egoistic motives weaken perceptions of donors' communal traits, in turn reducing charitable donations. In contrast, inferences of altruistic motives strengthen perceptions of donors' communal traits and increase donations of both money and time.

The present research enhances our theoretical understanding of how consumers indirectly influence one another to donate. In so doing, they underscore the importance of conveying not just what one contributed, but why. Inferred motives—which may differ from donors' actual motives—have downstream impacts on whether and how much others contribute.

These findings have implications for practitioners. Donation platform managers may wish to encourage inferences of altruistic motives, for example through the messages they display. Future research can seek to identify additional ways of conveying the altruistic motives that are so crucial in moving others to join in and support the cause.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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