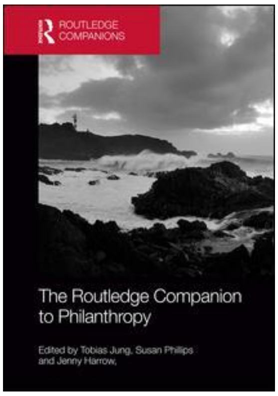

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Charity communications

Shaping donor perceptions and giving

Sally Hibbert

In 1952, Gerhard Wiebe asked the question 'Why can't you sell brotherhood like you can sell soap?' Since then, the charity sector has developed high levels of expertise in marketing and fundraising communications. Backed by other elements of the charity's strategy, these now play an important role in triggering, and shaping, the donation decisions of millions of people who, each year, give time, money and other forms of in kind support to an array of causes. Donors learn about charities and the causes that they support via communications from a variety of sources, and charities cannot directly influence all forms of communication about their organization or cause. However, it is vital that, where they have a degree of control, they develop communication strategies that effectively serve to trigger giving and are conducive to sustainable donor support.

Developing appeals that resonate with donors requires considerable skill and creativity. Poorly conceived campaigns that lack credibility or are perceived to manipulate, pressure or badger potential donors can engender resistance and resentment rather than encourage donors to join the charity in working for a particular cause; repeat errors in this area can severely tarnish a charity's reputation. Hence, research that demonstrates and illuminates how fundraising communications influence philanthropy is vital to support fundraisers tasked with managing donor communications and engagement. Given considerable innovations in fundraising, the need for such insights has increased over the last few years. New ways in which individuals can support good causes continue to emerge with developments in technology, media and in the context of changing relations between charities, government, business, communities and individual donors.

This chapter reviews current understanding of the ways in which fundraising communications shape donor behaviour and examines the communication challenges that charities face in the twenty-first century. It examines elements of fundraising communications that influence donor perceptions and their inclination to give, and considers the challenges that face fundraisers operating in contemporary communications environments.

Fundraising communications

The majority of donations to charity are made in response to solicitations (Bekkers, 2005; Bryant *et al.*, 2003). Over the years, a reasonable body of research has emerged that informs our understanding of how to shape donor perceptions and trigger giving. A variety of features have been found to influence donor perceptions and behaviour, which can be grouped under three generic themes, namely, the source and content of the message and the nature of the request for help (Bendapudi *et al.*, 1996) which are used to structure this review of the extant literature. One-way forms of communication remain prominent in fundraising but new technologies that afford opportunities for charity-donor interactions, donor-to-donor interactions and, indeed, communications between various stakeholder groups demand that charities also build understanding of how dialogical communications will shape the meaning of philanthropy and donation behaviour going forward. Hence, towards the end of the chapter, attention turns to some of the new challenges facing fundraisers and the emergent research that provides insights into fundraising in the new communications landscape.

The source of fundraising messages

When individuals interpret communications, they are heavily influenced by the credibility of the source. As fundraising messages emanate from charities, individuals' perceptions of their brand image – the embodiment of a charity's character – is a key determinant of donation decisions (Bennett and Gabriel, 2003; Michel and Rieunier, 2011).

Charity brand image

A recognized and trustworthy brand is extremely powerful for charities. When donors give to charity, they are essentially 'buying' an intangible service and, as the service provider, the charity is a focal point in their decision-making (Venables *et al.*, 2005). In many Western countries, the charity marketplace is crowded; the decision of which charity to give to is potentially very complex. So, people frequently donate to a well-known charity, using their knowledge of the charity brand as a short cut to a good, or at least satisfactory, donation decision. Michel and Rieunier (2011) illustrate this with data on donations to the Asian tsunami, which show that the amount collected by the various humanitarian aid charities closely matched rates of spontaneous charity recognition amongst the general public.

For many donors, charities provide a means by which they can help others and support causes when it is not viable for them to be directly and actively involved in helping. There is a set of core attributes – 'efficient', 'effective' and 'accountable' – that people associate with the charity sector as a whole (Sargeant *et al.*, 2008) and that are highly influential in their decisions to donate (Michel and Rieunier, 2011). In addition, personality traits related to trustworthiness such as 'honest', 'reputable' and 'reliable' are widely linked to charity brands in people's minds (Venables *et al.*, 2005; Sargeant *et al.*, 2008). Trust is essential to promote charitable giving and charities are sorely aware that trust in the whole sector is damaged by bad practices in just a small minority of charities (Webb *et al.*, 2000). Accordingly, there have been sector-wide initiatives to assure donors of charities' integrity by establishing standards for best practice and increasing transparency. Other traits that are widely applied to charities are those that reflect the nurturing roles that charities often assume, such as 'caring' and 'compassionate' (Venables *et al.*, 2005). Marketing scholars have suggested that because people tend to associate these generic traits with all charities, it does not make sense for charities to concentrate on these features as they craft their brand image (Sargeant and Hudson, 2008). Nonetheless, perceptions that charities are well managed and trustworthy are vitally important in shaping attitudes that predispose people to give; transparent reporting of the charity's operations through annual reports, reviews, accounts and websites is essential to enable donors to assess the charity's performance in terms of core attributes if they so wish. Such information is also available from regulators and independent enterprises, such as Intelligent Giving and Guidestar. Further, the last few years have seen a burgeoning interest amongst charitable organizations in measuring and reporting on impact, as donors become increasingly concerned to learn how their donated resources have made a difference (Hebb with MacKinnon, Chapter 29; Schnurbein, Chapter 30).

The more abstract dimensions of brands – brand values, personality, heritage – afford better opportunities to create a unique brand image. A study by Sargeant *et al.* (2008) identified four types of attributes, linked either with causes or organizations, on which a differentiated brand image can be based: 'emotional stimulation traits', including traits such as exciting, fun, heroic, innovative, inspiring and modern; 'service traits', being approachable, compassionate, dedicated; 'voice traits', being ambitious, authoritative, bold; and 'tradition traits', being traditional. This is by no means a comprehensive list of characteristics that can be promoted to differentiate a charity's brand image but it highlights the types of traits that help to distinguish charities in donors' minds and enables them to identify charities that work for their preferred causes in ways that they advocate. For instance, the ethos of The Big Issue homeless charity is 'a hand up, not a hand out', which appeals to donors who recognize the importance of empowering people who have become homeless rather than simply putting a roof over their heads (Hibbert *et al.*, 2005).

In addition to creating a distinctive brand, charities also need to consider the appeal of their brand image to different donor segments. There is very little published research on this issue, but a study by Bennett (2003) investigated donor preferences for charities with different organizational values. Based on a content analysis of the websites and promotional literature of the UK's top 50 charities (in terms of income), he produced a list of common organizational values espoused by charities. These include: changing society as we know it, making people independent and self-sufficient, looking after every aspect of the beneficiary's life, being innovative and creative and empowering the people the charity is trying to help. The analysis of donor preferences revealed that individuals' personal values are important determinants of the organizational values that they favour. For instance, people who value achievement favour charities with ambitions to 'change society as we know it' and individuals who value hedonism favour 'empowering the people the charity is trying to help' as an organizational value. Hence, psychographic information on the charity's supporters and engagement with them is vital to be able to cultivate a charity brand identity that is congruent with donors' self-image.

The content of fundraising messages

It is important for fundraising messages to come from a credible source, but the persuasiveness of the message is also dependent on its content. Five aspects of message content have been found to influence donor responses to solicitations: the need for help, the representation of beneficiaries, beneficiary-donor similarity, labeling and social comparison (Bendapudi *et al.*, 1996). An overview of research on each of these issues is set out below.

The need for help

Becoming aware that someone is threatened by or actually suffering undesirable consequences is an important trigger for philanthropy (Guy and Patton, 1989). Charities' fundraising communications are not the only source from which people learn that others are in need; channels such as media and word of mouth are influential too, but fundraising communications have an important role to play in raising awareness of causes. Research carried out over several decades has established that perception of need increases the likelihood of people behaving altruistically in general and, more specifically, of contributing to fundraising appeals (Berkowitz, 1968; Bickman and

Kamzan, 1973; Sinha and Jain, 1986; Cheung and Chan, 2000; Lee and Farrell, 2003). However, individuals' interpretations of the circumstance surrounding the need for help moderate their responses. In particular, they consider whether beneficiaries are responsible for their situation, the severity and urgency of the need and the potential consequences for the beneficiaries and for themselves as helpers (Guy and Patton, 1989). Individuals are more inclined to help when they believe that the beneficiaries' circumstances are beyond their control (Piliavin *et al.*, 1975) than when they believe they are due to the beneficiaries' own dispositions and behaviour (Campbell *et al.*, 2001). Emergency disaster appeals often attract widespread support because those affected are blameless, the need is intense, urgent and there are dramatic consequences if help is not given. Not surprisingly, awareness of a need for help increases when the potential beneficiaries of a charitable organization are known to an individual (Burgoyne *et al.*, 2005, Wiepking, 2006; Bekkers and Meijer, 2008) or when their own experiences relate to the cause (Bennett, 2003).

Although donors develop predispositions to support certain causes, they tend to want to help in specific ways. An important development by charities has been the move to afford donors choice about how they help by asking them which scheme (e.g., habitat conservation, educational programs) they would like to support or, at a more specific level, which type of animal they would like to sponsor. Packaging needs into 'products' also help to communicate that donors' help will be effective. This is an important consideration when individuals are making donation decisions. When fundraising messages represent the need as a grand problem (e.g. 'millions of children die every year as a result of drinking contaminated water') potential donors are likely to feel that their help will be inconsequential, whereas a narrower conception of the need and specification of a way of helping (e.g. 'by purchasing one water filter you can protect Joe's family for five years') enables donors to envisage the impact of their support.

Representation of beneficiaries

A key feature of fundraising appeals that influences donor responses concerns the portrayal of beneficiaries by charities. In particular, research interest has centred on whether appeals should represent beneficiaries' negative circumstances or the positive outcomes that can be achieved through the charity's work. Traditionally, negative portrayals of beneficiaries' circumstances were widely used by charities, but, over the years, there was growing opposition to this practice because it contributed to the stigmatization and disadvantage of beneficiaries. For instance, by representing people with disabilities as dependent and helpless, charities were counteracting broader movements to build equality and change attitudes towards diversity. Consequently, recent years have witnessed a shift towards more positively framed communications by many charities. For example, the UK charity Scope states 'Our vision is a world where disabled people have the same opportunities to fulfil their life ambitions as everyone else'. Some charities have even changed their name to better reflect the charity's mission. Negative portrayals of beneficiaries' circumstances have not disappeared, but there is now a balance between negatively and positively framed appeals. An audit of charity advertisements that appeared in the British newspaper *The Guardian* in 2007 (Ridge, 2008) revealed that 53 percent of advertisements presented a positive aspect and 47 percent presented a negative one, and a negative perspective is more widely adopted for certain types of appeals such as social welfare and international aid.

A number of studies have examined the question of how effective are positive or negative appeals in soliciting donations, but the findings are somewhat mixed. Several studies that have compared positive and negative appeals have found no difference in their capacity to solicit donations (Feldman and Feldman, 1985; Brolley and Anderson, 1986; Adler *et al.*, 1991). However, Eayrs and Ellis (1990) found that responses to a door-to-door appeal were lower when a negative rather than positive appeal was used, while recent research by Fisher *et al.* (2008) found negative appeals to be more effective than positive appeals in a fundraising campaign by a television station. A study by Small and Verrochi (2009) revealed that donors were more responsive to advertisements featuring beneficiaries with sad rather than happy or neutral facial expressions. However, there may be important moderating influences on these relationships that, as yet, are ill understood. For instance, Chang and Lee (2009) illustrated that temporal framing (i.e. the time scale linked with the need and consequences) has an impact on whether positive or negative appeal are more effective. Fisher *et al.* (2008) note that progress in understanding the effects of emotional fundraising appeals has been hindered by inadequate theoretical development and call for new scholarship to develop robust conceptual foundations for research into these issues.

In addition to research that compares generic positive and negative appeals, a number of studies have examined the effectiveness of appeals that arouse specific types of emotions. Guilt appeals have received greatest attention and the evidence suggests that the arousal of guilt does promote giving (Basil *et al.*, 2006, 2008; Hibbert *et al.*, 2007). There is some debate about the intensity of emotions that should be aroused to maximize effects. Some scholars suggest that the arousal of moderate levels of guilt is most effective in generating desired responses (Coulter and Pinto, 1995; Yinon *et al.*, 1976), but other studies have found no evidence that audiences are resistant to guilt-intensive communications (Bennett, 1998), and this debate rumbles on. Curiously, despite the increasing use of positive emotional appeals, very little research has been undertaken to investigate the effects on giving of specific positive emotions such as pride and elevation (Hibbert and Chuah, 2009). Another outstanding area of inquiry concerns ways in which individual differences moderate the arousal of emotions in audiences and their cognitive and behavioural responses. Psychological features – such as perceived locus of control, self-blame, inherent guilt and self-esteem – affect individuals' responses to guilt appeals (Ghingold, 1981; Bennett, 1998), and theoretical work around moral emotions suggests that individuals' values and self-identity are likely to influence how they respond to specific positive and negative emotional appeals. More research is, however, needed to build an adequate knowledge based to inform charities' use of emotional appeals. This is a research direction that may be given further impetus from UK media reports that some charity requests, in their framing and volume, are becoming too demanding, even intimidating for some would-be donors (Hussein and Barrow, 2015), raising the question of fundraising's regulation (Breen, Chapter 14).

Literature concerned with beneficiary portrayals has also investigated whether gender and physical appearance influence the responses of prospective donors. This is a very limited area of inquiry, but evidence suggests that the presentation of female rather than male beneficiaries leads to greater donor compliance (Feinman, 1978) and that physically attractive subjects are perceived to be more worthy of help (Latane and Nida, 1981).

Beneficiary/donor similarity

As discussed above, a primary motive for philanthropy is that individuals experience personal distress when they are aware of a need. The intensity of their distress is greater when the person in need is similar in some way to the prospective benefactor (Piliavin *et al.*, 1981; Margolis, 1982). The similarity may relate to physical characteristics or to more intangible factors such as ethnicity, culture and personal values. For instance, an experimental study by Collaizi *et al.* (1984) found that people were more willing to help others who were of the same sex as themselves. Research suggests that the influence of beneficiary donor similarity on giving is moderated by personal characteristics. For example, Mitchell and Byrne (1973) found that the tendency to support beneficiaries similar to oneself is greater amongst authoritarian personality types than those who are more egalitarian and have greater tolerance for people from 'out-groups' (i.e. social groups of which they are not a member/who are dissimilar to them). Scholarship on discriminatory helping practices also suggests that features of the helping situation are likely to play a moderating role (Saucier *et al.*, 2005).

Social labeling

Alongside persuasion tactics, fundraisers make use of labeling to encourage giving. Labeling theory proposes that individuals act in ways that are consistent with the social labels and behaviours that others attribute to them. A primary means by which labeling influences behaviour is via its potential to manipulate and affirm aspects of self-identity (Burger and Caldwell, 2003). Early research by Kraut (1973) applied this principle to charitable giving and found that people labeled as 'charitable' gave more and those labeled as 'uncharitable' gave less than control groups in the study. Subsequent research has provided support for his findings and generated further evidence that attaching labels such as 'generous' and 'philanthropic' to individuals augments their motivation to help, results in more helping behaviour (Swinyard and Ray, 1977; Wechasara *et al.*, 1987) and improves attitudes towards charities requesting support (Moore *et al.*, 1985). Labeling is suggested to have a greater influence on people for whom giving is not central to their self-identity, because their motivation is more dependent on external factors. In such cases, labeling tends to be more effective when it comes from credible sources, such as established, high profile charities while committed philanthropists, motivated by their internal moral self, are more accepting of labeling from less prominent charities (Bendapudi *et al.*, 1996). But labeling is not inconsequential for established donors. Indeed, research into donor loyalty suggests that labeling techniques are an important aspect of relationship building and that charities' application of words such as 'kind', 'helpful' and 'generous' to its supporters is an important aspect of feedback (Sargeant *et al.*, 2001; Sargeant and Woodliffe, 2007). This body of research suggests that when ad hoc and relational fundraising communications incorporate elements that refer to donors, rather than focusing entirely on beneficiaries, it is advantageous to make use of labeling to create feelings of pride and motivate a positive response from donors.

Social comparison

There is widespread acknowledgement that social influences are important in shaping philanthropy. Research shows that people who are well integrated into social institutions such as social clubs, religious organizations and schools are more prone to give than those who are not (Radley and Kennedy, 1995). More broadly, when individuals recognize that giving is normative, their propensity to donate increases (Martin and Randal, 2005). The practice of announcing how much has been donated to a current campaign or a telethon is an example of the application of this principle in that individuals are moved to respond and make a donation themselves when they see that thousands of other people have deemed it the 'right thing to do'. People are similarly influenced when they learn that aspirational reference groups support a cause, an effect harnessed by the 2012 Give Blood campaign in the UK that features sports stars and claims 'Celebrities back campaign to boost blood stocks for 2012'. Informing people how much others have given also influences the amount that they donate, such that they increase their contribution if they learn that others have given more and decrease it if they learn that others have given less (Shang and Croson, 2006; Croson and Shang, 2008). The normative influence is magnified when people are also given information about the consequences of helping (LaTour and

Manrai, 1989), as people find it more difficult to argue against helping when the benefits for the beneficiary are clearly articulated. Other research suggests that people are more likely to help when rewards for helping – praise, thanks, social and material benefits – come via a social group of which an individual is, or aspires to be, a member (Fisher and Ackerman, 1998). One way in which charities have sought to leverage social and self-presentation influences is by enabling 'conspicuous compassion' (Grace and Griffin, 2006, 2009; West, 2004), providing wrist bands and empathy ribbons for supporters who make a donation.

The nature of the request

The way in which charities approach donors can make a considerable difference to the success of a fundraising campaign and can also enhance or damage perceptions of the charity. The nature of the request for help is an important element of the communication process that influences donation decisions, and research has found that prospective donors are influenced by the method of solicitation and how much they are asked to give.

The method of solicitation

People give to charity through cash donations, direct debits, credit and debit cards or cheques and payroll giving, and in response to solicitations through mail, telephone, TV and radio, canvassing in the street or door-to-door, workplace schemes, collections at places of worship, events, sponsorship, raffles and in memoriam. Other donations come through legacies, payment of fees, purchases and when people approach a charitable organization unprompted. In recent years, with changes in technology, people have been presented with new opportunities to give through mobile phones, at ATMs and card payment systems at till points and online, while developments in corporate social responsibility have increased opportunities for individuals to contribute through partnerships between charities and businesses. The amount of income generated through each of these methods is not a reflection of their popularity. For example, the value of donations collected at places of worship is very high compared to the proportion of people who give in this way. Information such as level of income and longevity of donor relationships needs to be used to make decisions about investment in different fundraising mechanisms. In addition, charities need to track new trends and invest for the future. For instance, recent research suggests that giving through new technologies lags behind usage for other purposes. In 2011, the NCVO reported that while two-thirds of consumers shop online, only seven percent had made a donation online (NCVO, 2011). Charity income coming from online donations is growing year on year and charities are responding by developing communications to support giving in this way (e.g. websites, Twitter, Facebook), but further investment is needed if they are to seize the opportunity of connecting with donors through new channels.

Some of the methods indicated above (e.g. direct mail, telephone, door-to-door/in-street canvassing, workplace schemes, sponsorship, legacies) have attracted considerable research interest and discrete bodies of literature have emerged that focus on understanding the influence on giving via these specific methods. In addition, the more general questions of which forms of solicitation are more successful, and why, have attracted academic attention over several decades. Early research found personal forms of solicitation to be more successful than impersonal or telephone requests in terms of rates of compliance (Long, 1976; Brockner *et al.*, 1984) and the amount donated (Thornton *et al.*, 1991). In part, these effects relate to social influences and the conspicuousness of the donation. Indeed, research suggests that the effects of face-to-face solicitations are even stronger when made by people who are familiar, of close social distance or similar to the prospective donor (Bekkers and Wiepking, 2007; Meer, 2010). Responses to different forms of solicitation are also shaped by beliefs about philanthropy. Research carried out in the UK has illustrated that there is opposition to methods that transgress people's beliefs that philanthropy should be an act of free will and a nonprofit activity. Hence, donors disapprove of forms of solicitation that are perceived to pressure donors or to be intrusive (e.g. telephone calls), as well as methods that involve for-profit enterprises (e.g. external agencies contracted to undertake door-to-door collections) (Hibbert and Horne, 1997; Sargeant and Jay, 2004; Sargeant and Hudson, 2008). Going forward, there is considerable scope to extend research in this area and, in particular, to examine the implications of recent changes in the communications landscape for charitable solicitations. With a growing number of stories about the power of social media for fundraising (Bernholz, Chapter 28), more rigorous research is needed to examine ways in which these new social media tools can be deployed to increase the effectiveness of requests for funds and develop theoretical frameworks to explain their effects.

Scholars who have examined the effects of past experience with a charitable organization on subsequent donations have affirmed that once a donor has been successfully recruited by a charity, it is more likely that he or she will give again to that charity (Kaehler and Sargeant, 1998). Trust is central to ongoing support and the development of trust between charitable organizations' and their donors is clearly linked to donor loyalty (Sargeant and Lee, 2004). Research by Sargeant (2001) and Burnett (2002) has concluded that the perceived quality of the charitable organizations' service to beneficiaries, the perceived impact of previous donations and the extent to which the donors feel they exert control over their relationship with the charity all significantly affect the likelihood of retaining a committed and loyal donor base. Hence, for repeat donations, it is not simply the method of solicitation that is important but the broader management of the relationship with donors. There is little research into the effectiveness of solicitation methods for repeat or committed donors, but insights from the donor relationships literature suggest that it is important that the solicitation of repeat donations affords donor choice and control, with careful attention to donor preferences and giving histories.

The size and timing of the request

A key question for charities concerns the amount that they should ask donors to give. It has long been agreed that asking for a specific sum is a better strategy than not proposing an amount to donate (Brockner *et al.*, 1984; Fraser *et al.*, 1988). This approach has been widely adopted by charities for solicitations through a variety of channels and it is common practice to give options about the size of the donation by suggesting amounts. However, research has provided less clear guidance on how much to ask for. An early study by Schwarzwald *et al.* (1983) compared requests for low, medium and high amounts and nonspecified amounts and did not find any differences in donors' responses. Weyant and Smith (1987) found that a request for a small amount increased compliance rates and did not affect the average size of donations, whereas a request for a large contribution negatively impacted compliance rates and average donations were unaffected. In contrast, research by Doob and McLaughlin (1989) found that asking for large amounts had no effect on compliance rates but it did increase average donations. The difference between these studies was partly explained by the research context, and Doob and McLaughlin suggested that requests for large amounts are more likely to be successful when the charity has an existing relationship with the donors. Further, they stressed that when charities request large amounts they should ensure that it is within an acceptable range for the target group. Surveys have similarly found that donors place a high level of importance on charities 'asking for appropriate sums' (Sargeant and Jay, 2004). Recent research has pursued this issue and emphasises that past donation behaviour (Desmet and Feinberg, 2003) and donation reference price are important factors that moderate people's responses to requests for specific amounts (Verhaert and van den Poel, 2011). It may be more fruitful, then, for charities to adapt the amount requested to the target group or even to individual donors if they have data on giving histories.

In addition, a number of studies have examined how legitimizing small donations affects compliance (Cialdini and Schroeder, 1976). Evidence suggests that legitimizing small donations with phrases such as 'every little helps' increases compliance with face-to-face donation requests (Reingen, 1978; Weyant, 1984; Reeves *et al.*, 1987; Fraser *et al.*, 1988), although this does not necessarily hold true in the case of previous donors (Doob and McLaughlin, 1989) and it is not as effective for impersonal forms of fundraising (Brockner *et al.*, 1984; Reeves *et al.*, 1987; Weyant and Smith, 1987; DeJong and Oopik, 1992) when donors' decisions are less time pressured and social influence processes are weaker. Dolinski *et al.* (2005) demonstrated that meaningful social interactions amplify the effectiveness of legitimizing paltry contributions. This study revealed that a monologue directed at donors prior to asking for a contribution increased compliance rates, but the effects were even greater when donors were engaged in a dialogue prior to a request accompanied by the statement 'every little helps'. These findings are of particular significance in relation to some new mechanisms for giving (e.g. rounding up) that promote regular, small gifts but new research is required to understand how to maximize compliance (e.g. role of sales staff, use of avatars, framing of messages) when solicitations are technology mediated.

The timing of donations has received very little attention, yet this is a key issue for donors and some are scared off when the only option is to commit to regular donations through mechanisms such as direct debits. In most fundraising contexts, charities do offer donors choice regarding the timing of gifts, for example, through monthly direct debits and annual subscriptions. New technologies are extending this further; for instance, fundraising via monthly SMS (short message service) messages is increasingly moving donors from one-time gifts to regular monthly commitments, made with ease. However, there is a need for rigorous studies to examine how different approaches to timing influence response levels, amounts and rates of donor attrition.

Looking to the future

The communications issues addressed above have long been of concern to charity fundraisers who face the tough job of developing high quality requests for funds and fostering donor loyalty in an ever more crowded marketplace. It is important that the sector continues to build knowledge about how to ask for support and shares practice-based learning and experience. At the same time, changes in the contemporary communications landscape are creating pressures on fundraisers to shift more attention towards e-philanthropy (Bernholz, Chapter 28). Rapid technological developments in recent years have meant that the internet, social networking and technology-mediated service delivery have become increasingly prominent aspects of lifestyle. These technologies are increasingly establishing themselves as essential tools of fundraising. Charities are using websites, social networking and collaborations with industry partners to enable giving through mechanisms such as ATMs, rounding up and online shopping platforms. Further, collaborative ventures continue to experiment with new giving formats (e.g. Open Fundraising developed a regular SMS donation package by which donors could confirm or skip a monthly donation by responding to a text, Aldridge, 2010). Elements of our existing knowledge about asking for donations will be relevant to solicitation through these new mechanisms. For instance, labeling and social comparison might feature in a text message in the same way as they do in a radio advertisement. But there is still much for charities to learn to enable them to harness this diverse range of new mechanisms, which are vital for engaging the next generation of donors.

Research on these relatively new ways of connecting with donors is starting to emerge, although most early studies have focused on charities' adoption of new mechanisms and technologies (Goatman and Lewis, 2007; Waters *et al.*, 2009) and few studies (Bennett, 2009) examine prospective donors' experiences of communications from or with charities through channels such as websites, texts, emails, social network sites or rounding up schemes. One very important change that has accompanied the innovations in communication technologies is the shift from one-way communications (from charities to donors) towards a dialogue between charities, donors and, in some instances, other stakeholders. The opportunity for donors to be more active players has implications for both the nature and the purpose of communications with donors (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000); whereas one-way communications typically convey information and emotive content intended to persuade and encourage compliance with a request for help, a dialogue with donors aims to promote broader engagement recognizing their potential to support the charity through monetary contributions but also by volunteering and supporting advocacy and campaigning activities. Technology now enables charities to have a conversation with individuals and groups of donors as a starting point for sharing a broad set of resources – ideas, skills, knowledge, information, time, votes – that support the charity, its beneficiaries and satisfy the motives of their supporters. There is a burgeoning body of literature that examines how people are engaging with new forms of technology – investigating phenomena such as e-WOM (word of mouth e.g. blogs, online bulletin boards, chat rooms, newsgroups, consumer reviews) (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004) and online communities (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010) – that can be drawn upon by charities to develop communications strategies and skills geared to the new environment, but the sector also needs a programme of research and forums for sharing experience and learning to understand how these phenomena translate to philanthropic contexts.

Concluding comments

The fundraising landscape is changing and the coming decades will undoubtedly witness the introduction of many new mechanisms for fundraising. Yet solicitations are likely to remain a vital means of triggering donations and finding the best ways to ask will continue to challenge fundraisers. Research that informs fundraising communications has attracted steady interest, from a variety of disciplines, over several decades. Together this body of literature has provided insights into key features of fundraising communications that influence donors. However, in many areas, the evidence is sparse or dated and there is a need for a more rigorous programme of research, grounded in theory, to generate a sound and contemporary evidence base to enable charities to continue to improve the quality of their requests for support and adapt them to the current environment. Given that research in this area emanates from several disciplines, there is potential to deliver a rich understanding of the factors that shape responses to charitable solicitations, but dialogue across disciplines is needed to deliver the benefits and avoid the creation of a disjointed body of knowledge. As the changing mechanisms for donating to charity raise new questions about solicitation, one would also hope to see new knowledge coming from disciplines that have not previously contributed to the research in this area.

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