

Saliency of the Coronavirus and its Impact on Charitable Giving

by

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Abstract

Previous research has shown emotions can significantly influence whether someone will donate to an organization. Furthermore, proximity and personal experience affect philanthropic behavior. Also, if media make consumers feel sympathetic, they are more likely to become philanthropic. This phenomenon is called sympathy bias. It is unknown, however, if this theory will pertain to philanthropic behavior during the coronavirus. To understand the factors that affect contemporary individual philanthropy, I conducted a survey experiment with over 140 participants to determine what influences individual giving. Each participant was randomly assigned either an emotionally charged article covering the coronavirus, a statistical article covering the coronavirus, or no article and then presented with a hypothetical scenario where they can decide to donate money to a coronavirus research organization. I find participants given either article were significantly more likely to donate money than those in the control group. Additionally, the influence of ideology was minimized in those conditions. This research contributes to the literature by examining how different media frames of the coronavirus affect philanthropic giving.

Key words: Sympathy bias, philanthropy, coronavirus, media frames

Introduction

In the weeks following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, over half a billion dollars were donated by Americans to organizations that aided in recovery and relief efforts. Eventually, the total increased approximately four times that number, to over two billion dollars with the help of international allies (“Donations for Katrina Relief and Recovery Pass \$1 Billion Mark” 2005). Two months after the devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina, American donations to relief agencies surpassed two billion dollars (Rooney 2017). In response to both of these grave incidents in our history, millions of Americans reached into their pocket, despite their own struggles, and donated money to help others.

But in March of 2020, the coronavirus upended the United States in unprecedented ways. Although natural disasters and pandemics happened before, the coronavirus sent shocks both economically and socially, which are still being felt today. Moreover, every single American has been personally affected by the virus outbreak. From not knowing when toilet paper was going to be restocked on shelves, to being laid off from a job, to losing a friend or family member, the coronavirus has changed every American life.

In this paper I examine the coronavirus’s effect on donors. My research questions are: Who is most likely to donate to an organization addressing the coronavirus? Did Covid-19 change donating behavior? Can media coverage of the virus affect donation behavior? It is essential to study the impact coronavirus has on individual giving to gain a better understanding of the factors that influence

people to donate to organizations during a public health crisis. By understanding the motives that influence Americans to donate to organizations, these very organizations that need funding will be able to make more effective advertisements and solicitations encouraging people to donate. This is particularly important since cutting back tax incentives has led to a decrease in individual donations¹ (“Giving USA 2019” 2019), and that the entire global community is facing such uncertain times due to the coronavirus.

In this paper, I will review the existing literature on individual giving, sympathy biases, and media priming and framing. Following the literature review, I will present my survey experiment, in which, participants were randomly assigned either an emotionally charged article covering the coronavirus, a statistical article covering the coronavirus, or no article (the control group) and then presented with a hypothetical question asking about a donation to an organization researching the coronavirus. I find the media frame of the coronavirus has no significant impact on whether someone would donate money to the organization. Instead, when presented with any kind of article, participants were more likely to give money than those who did not receive one. Additionally, the influence of ideology was minimized in those given an article compared to those in the control group. Finally, given my results, I offer suggestions of solicitation methods for nonprofits to more effectively garner donations. This

¹ In 2018, President Trump signed a law that cut tax incentives for donations by about a third. In doing so, individual giving decreased by 3.4% when adjusted for inflation (“Giving USA 2019” 2019).

research aims to examine what factors influence individual giving and what media frames of the coronavirus are most effective in encouraging philanthropic giving.

Literature Review

Trends of Individual Giving Prior to the Coronavirus

In 2016, before the Trump administration cut tax incentives on donations, there was \$390.05 billion donated to nonprofit organizations. The top three sectors of nonprofits that received the most donations were religious (31%), education (15%), and human services (12%). Most importantly, individual giving compromised 72% of all giving (“See the Numbers – Giving USA 2017 Infographic: Giving USA.” 2017.). In 2017, donations surpassed \$400 billion for the first time, continuing the trend of increased philanthropic giving (“Giving USA 2018: The Annual Report on Philanthropy for the Year of 2017” 2018).

Despite former President Trump cutting tax incentives for donations, there was \$427.71 billion donated, making 2018 the most generous year in American history (“Giving USA 2019” 2019). While this was a significant milestone for American philanthropy, there was a decrease in individual donors. For the first time in fifty years, individual giving contributed less than 70% of the overall giving. Tax incentives are a highly influential factor of giving (Bakija 2013). Therefore, it is not surprising that the number of individual donors decreased after the Trump administration’s move to dissolve some tax benefits to donors. Of all donations, 29% went to religious organizations, followed by 14% to education

based organizations, and 12% went to organizations that provide human services (2019).

Philanthropic giving in 2019 saw the same trend as its predecessor. The overall giving had increased by over \$20 billion to \$449.64 billion, yet individual giving remained below 70% of overall giving. Again, religious organizations had received 29% of all donations, education organizations 14%, and organizations providing human services received 12% (“Giving USA 2020: The Annual Report on Philanthropy for the Year of 2019” 2020). Because individual giving constitutes almost three-quarters of all donors, it is imperative to understand what influences individuals and how to encourage them to donate.

Who gives?

There have been many research studies conducted on the demographics of donors to nonprofits. One indicator of whether someone will donate money is their income level. In a UK study, more wealthy households were much more likely to provide regular donations than lower income houses (Pharaoh & Tanner 1997). Income can increase the likelihood of donating to nonprofits because people with higher income have the resources and capability to give money instead of needing it for themselves. This finding is not to say, however, that people with lower incomes are not philanthropic. In the same study, even though the wealthiest families gave more donations, when prompted for donations, the difference between the percent of the wealthiest families donating and the percent of the most impoverished families donating was much less significant (1997).

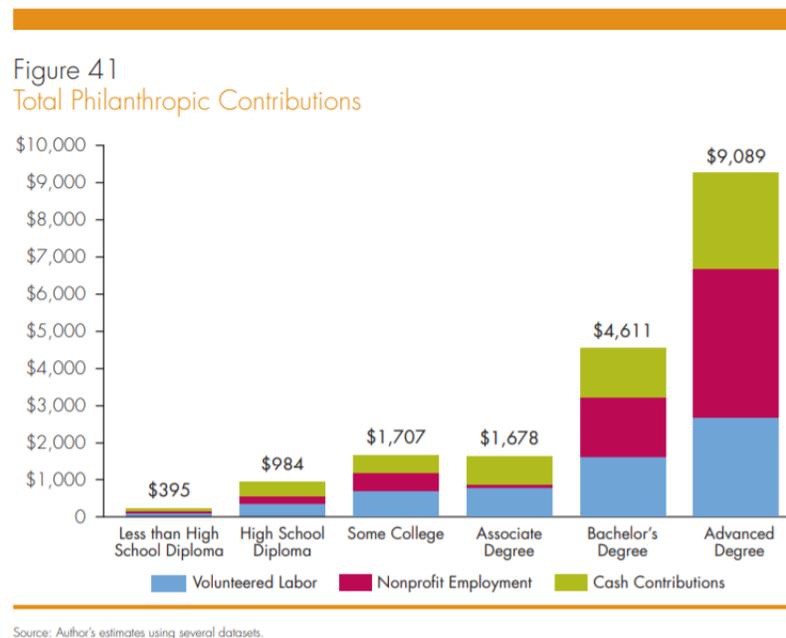
Additionally, data have suggested that people in Taiwan with the lowest income are “more likely to volunteer than were those in any other bracket” (Yu-Kang and Chang 2007). The perception of one’s financial status can affect the size of the donation. “[R]egardless of the actual financial resources held by a donor, the size of their donations is negatively affected by feelings of retention and inadequacy” (Wiepking & Breeze 2012).

Another factor that affects the probability of donating is ideology. Republicans in Republican-majority counties are more likely to donate money than Democrats in Democratic-majority counties (Paarlberg et al. 2019). This can partly be attributed to Republicans being more likely to attend religious organizations and “therefore are more subject to public demonstrations of giving—including tithing requirements, collection plates, and congregational fundraisers” (Margolis & Sances 2016). If Republicans know their peers are watching them in these social settings, they may act more philanthropic than they actually are to appear more generous. Conservatives are also more likely to donate more money to fewer organizations when compared to Liberals who give lesser amounts to more charities (Farmer, Kidwell, Hardesty 2020).

Another reason Republicans may be more inclined to donate money, particularly to organizations targeting the less fortunate, is because Conservatives “believe private service provision is more effective than government provision” (2016). This explanation is also supported by Paarlberg et al., who argue that Republicans donate more to organizations since they prefer less government intervention. Moreover, people who mistrust the government, or believe that the

government is not doing an adequate job in addressing a cause, are also more likely to donate money to aid the private sector (Brooks, Lewis, Bardach 2001).

The education level of donors may also impact the probability of someone donating to an organization. Not only are educated people “slightly more likely to volunteer” (Yao 2015), there seems to be a positive relationship between education level and annual contribution.



In the 2012 study displayed above, the annual cash donation amount made by someone with an advanced degree was fourteen times larger than a person with less than a high school diploma (Trostel 2012). When compared to annual donations made by people with high school diplomas, the annual donation of people with advanced degrees was six times larger. However, “[t]he increase in average giving with college attainment is due both to an increase in the proportion

of people giving and to an increase in the average contribution of those giving” (2012).

Sympathy Bias

A strategy used by nonprofits to gain traction with potential donors is to employ emotionally appealing advertising. Largely, these appeals are split into two distinct categories, “negative emotional appeals” and “positive emotional appeals” (Septianto & Tijptono 2019). When utilizing a negative emotional appeal, some advertisers are trying to evoke sympathy, which is “triggered by another person’s misfortune” (Sudhir, Roy, Cherian 2016). When participants in studies were triggered to feel sympathy, they were more likely to be charitable (Bagozzi and Moore 1994). This phenomenon is known as the sympathy bias.

Other research has suggested that potential donors are more likely to identify with causes that they have a personal relationship with or know someone that does (Small 2011). By knowing someone that had suffered from a specific adversity, the distance between the potential donor and the adversity becomes smaller, making the sympathy stronger (2011). Small also argues that this is why there is more of a philanthropic effort for natural disasters rather than “widespread and persistent problems, such as starvation and water- or insect-borne disease, fail to arouse sympathy and attract donations” (2011).

Similar to Septiano and Tijptono, who argued that people who experience feelings of sympathy are more likely, to act altruistically, Small claims that people who know someone suffering from a cause or have suffered themselves feel the same sympathy. Putting this into today’s context, people who have had the

coronavirus or know someone who has, is more likely to act in an altruistic way towards organizations focused on the coronavirus.

Researchers believe that part of the reason sympathy bias can be so successful in influencing donors to give is because humans are not as sensitive to absolute numbers as they are proportions. Sudhir, Roy, Cherian provides the example of “[t]en deaths concentrated in a small neighborhood of hundred people will evoke much greater consternation than ten deaths across a large city of a million people. The identified victim is an extreme example where by making the individual the cause, the reference group size is reduced to the victim” (2016). Moreover, some research has shown that when there is a singular identified victim, versus a group of victims, donors are more likely to give (Kogut & Ritov 2005).

Other Emotional Appeals in Advertising

Batson et al. conducted an experiment to better understand the relationship between empathy and altruism. Their results suggest that there is a positive correlation between the two concepts of empathy and altruism (1981). Bagozzi and Moore conducted another experiment that reinforces the findings in Septiano and Tijptano. When their participants were given public service announcements to reduce child abuse, the researchers were able to make the participants feel negative emotions, which “lead to empathic reactions and end with the decision to help” (1994). Based on these findings, one can infer that when a donor is given an

emotional appeal, they will be more likely to act in an altruistic way, such as donating money to a cause.

A UK study that analyzed over 1,000 advertisement campaigns found that advertisements that solely utilized emotional appeals almost doubled their reported gains compared to campaigns that only used rational content (Pringle and Field 2008). Unlike rationally based advertisements that have informational content that “has to be filtered through the cognitive areas of our brain and analysed before we can maybe begin to feel good about the brand and buy it,” solely emotionally based advertisements and “[e]ngaging emotional brand associations do not require “cognitive processing” (2008). These emotional associations seem to create a cognitive shortcut that provides a direct mental pathway to action. When presented with statistics and rationale, consumers first need to understand the data presented to them before taking any other measures. While this difference may be minuscule, it could be the difference that affects whether a person donates to an organization or not.

Despite the effectiveness of emotional appeals, it should be noted that there are disadvantages to solely utilizing them in advertising which include “compassion fatigue” and “psychic numbing” (Brundage 2015). In her book, *Lying Down in the Ever-Falling Snow*, Wendy Austin describes compassion fatigue as “too weary to be with the suffering of others in the way they once were” (2013). Although her book focuses on compassion fatigue through the lens of healthcare workers, donors can experience a similar phenomenon. When donors are persistently bombarded with requests for donations due to an “over-

dependency” on individual contributions by organizations, some of those donors will either decrease their giving amount or stop giving entirely (Awardi 2020). Consequently, organizations should be mindful and rely on a few highly effective advertisements rather than many advertisements in order to avoid donor fatigue.

Psychic numbing also presents a challenge to nonprofits that are seeking donations from individuals. “[L]arge numbers have been found to lack meaning and to be underweighted in decisions unless they convey affect” (Vastfjall & Slovic 2015). This notion is similar to the one presented by Pringle and Field in that when presented with numbers and statistics, the viewer needs to process them before they can act upon them. And therefore, “as numbers get larger and larger, we become insensitive; numbers fail to trigger the emotion or feeling necessary to motivate action” (2015). If nonprofits over-utilize emotional appeals or conduct emotionally appealing ads that feature large numbers of people, the ads are less likely to be effective. Psychic numbing can also render statistical based advertisements less effective as donors become desensitized to the numbers, especially as the statistics grow in number.

The coronavirus presents an interesting challenge to psychic numbing because it is not a typical large-scale issue. News media report on new cases, new variants, and deaths caused by the coronavirus every day. With this constant stream of new data, it brings the questions; Are people more desensitized to the coronavirus, and does that affect philanthropic giving towards organizations focused on the coronavirus?

Media Priming and Framing

Due to the coronavirus's devastating effects, it is constantly being covered by news media. But how media decide to frame, or even cover particular stories can affect viewers' perception. In their 1987 book, *News that Matters*, Iyengar and Kinder establish media priming as "changes in the standards that people use to make political evaluations." Therefore, when the media focuses on a particular subject, it becomes more significant to the viewer. If the participants are given media that covers the coronavirus, then, according to Iyengar and Kinder, the viewers should view the coronavirus as more significant. Not only do media prime the viewer to see a topic more important, but because viewers are "sensitive to contextual cues when they reason about national affairs. Their explanations of [national] issues like terrorism or poverty are critically dependent upon the particular reference points furnished in media presentations" (Iyengar 1987). Based on Iyengar's findings, the way the media frame the coronavirus will impact the viewer's perception of the virus. Two of the frames Iyengar identifies are episodic and thematic. Unlike thematic framing, which provides a general context for an issue, episodic framing focuses on a specific case or event (Iyengar 1991).

Because the statistic based article used in one of my experimental treatments only provides general national news, it can be considered a thematic frame of the coronavirus. On the other hand, the emotionally charged article used in my survey can be categorized as an episodic framing of the coronavirus because it focuses on one personal story of a woman affected by the virus.

Methodology

In order to gain a broader understanding of the factors influencing individual giving, I created a short original online cross-sectional experimental survey using *Qualtrics*, a survey software. It was imperative to keep the survey completion time around five minutes to maximize the number of completed surveys. I collected survey responses for two weeks (October 26, 2020-November 9, 2020).²To share the survey, I used an anonymous link provided by *Qualtrics*.

The participants of the survey were a combination of a convenience sample as well as a snowball sample. I utilized convenience sampling to ensure that I would be able to have a substantial size of completed surveys within the two weeks. I was also able to capitalize on snowball sampling by participants sharing the link as well on their social media platforms. Having my participants share the link allowed the survey to be disseminated to participants I would not have otherwise contacted.

Before the survey's actual content, all respondents were required to indicate that their participation was voluntary and that they consented to the study. When the survey was started, all participants were asked to rank the top ten issues voters identified as a very important issue by Pew Research in 2020 to examine the saliency coronavirus had compared to other topical issues ("Important Issues in the 2020 Election" 2020).

² During this time, the coronavirus still dominated news headlines, however, the 2020 election was also occurring at this time, which also received extensive media coverage.

Afterward, *Qualtrics* randomly assigned each participant with one of the treatments. For my independent variable, the respondents were given either an emotionally charged article covering the coronavirus, a statistical article covering the coronavirus, or no article. The participants were given the ranking of important issues before the experiment to ensure that their responses would not be skewed after they would potentially read an article depending on their assigned treatment.

Both of the articles used for treatments were published news articles. Each of them featured a picture and short prose of around 220 words. It was crucial to control that both of these articles featured a picture and had an almost identical word count to ensure that participants would not be more likely to skip one due to its length or lack of visual appeal. The statistical article published in the *New York Times*³ was chosen because it heavily features statistics on how many new cases of coronavirus had emerged as well as how many deaths have occurred due to the virus. This image on the statistical article was a map that displayed death by the coronavirus by county. The emotionally appealing article from *The Detroit News*⁴ was chosen because it featured no statistics. Instead, it focused on the coronavirus's impact on one woman. The image included with this article was of Sandy Brown, the woman featured in the article, in front of her husband and son's caskets while wearing a mask.

³ See question I1 in appendix for the statistical article presented in the statistical treatment.

⁴ See question E1 in appendix for the emotional article presented in the emotional treatment.

Directly following this, the participants were presented with a hypothetical. In the hypothetical, the participants were given \$50 and the opportunity to donate the money to an unnamed organization researching the coronavirus. I decided to present an organization researching the coronavirus rather than an organization dedicated to finding a vaccine to prevent anti-vax people or people with vaccine hesitancy from skewing their answers. Additionally, the \$50 was chosen because it was between the average online donation amount of \$128 according to *Nonprofits Source* (Accessed 2021) and the rising popularity of microphilanthropy, which is electronic philanthropic giving of usually no more than \$10 (Pfeiffer 2020).

Based on previous literature, I expect that those exposed to the emotional article on the effects of the coronavirus will be more likely to donate money to the organization than those with statistic article and those without an article. Moreover, I expect that while those exposed to the statistical article will donate less often than those with the emotional article, they will still donate more than those with no article. The independent variable in my research is exposure to articles on the effects of the coronavirus and my dependent variables is individual donations. Additionally, I believe that conservatives and those with the highest level of educational degrees will be the most likely to donate money.

Following the hypothetical, the participants were asked to rank their reasons for donating to an organization and complete general demographic questions. If a participant did not feel comfortable answering, they could skip questions but could go back.

Description of Sample

After the two-week collection period ended, there was a total of 146 completed surveys. Almost half (47%) of the respondents were between the ages of 18-25. The second highest age group was people between the ages of 26-43, comprising 37.5%. The age group of 55-65 was the third highest with 8.8%, and all other age groups had less than 4%.

Overwhelmingly, 86% of my participants were female, and 83% of my respondents were white. Nearly half (45%) of the participants had some higher education degree, and another 41% had completed some college. Another overwhelming statistic was that three-quarters of the participants either had the coronavirus or directly knew someone who had.

When asked about their ideology, 18% of the respondents identified as conservatives. 35% reported themselves as moderates, and 46% identified as liberal. Furthermore, when asked about their religion, 50% identified as Christian; however, only 11.9% attended religious services weekly, indicating low religiosity. Of the sample, 28% were agnostic/atheistic or had no religion.

Because my sample is slightly more female, white, liberal, and higher educated, my findings are not necessarily generalizable to the United States' aggregate population. However, since the survey was conducted primarily in Frederick, Maryland, its findings are more generalizable to that population, particularly to a campus setting.

Findings

At the beginning of the survey, the participants were asked to rank the top issues voters identified as a very important issue by Pew Research in 2020⁵ from one (least important) to ten (most important). This ranking was necessary because while it is common knowledge that the coronavirus is an important issue in America, it vital to examine how its importance is perceived in the context of other topical issues. Below are the issues listed from least important to most important based on their average ranking from the participants in this study.

Table 1: Contemporary Issues Ranked by Participants

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Average Rank</u>
Supreme Court appointments	6.400
Violent crime	6.377
Gun policy	5.523
Healthcare	5.493
Foreign policy	5.477
Economic inequalities	5.327
Racial and ethnic inequalities	5.317
Immigration	5.293
The economy	5.267
The coronavirus outbreak	4.573

Based on each issue's average ranking, the coronavirus was the least important issue with an average of 4.573, about two points lower than the most important issue of Supreme Court Appointments. A possible explanation for the Supreme Court appointments being ranked highly is due to the highly contested

⁵ Pew Research was chosen because it is a nonpartisan think tank.

Confirmation of Justice Amy Comey Barrett by the Senate in late October, a few weeks before the release of this survey.

Despite this explanation, it is extremely telling that the coronavirus is ranked as least important in my sample. Perhaps, this is due to the psychic numbing effect. As Vastfjall and Slovic argued, when people are presented with overwhelming numbers, they become numb to them (2015). Feasibly, the constant news coverage displaying the statistics of the coronavirus's effects has made viewers numb to the issue.

Experimental Effects on Philanthropic Giving

Following the ranking of issues, each participant was randomly assigned either an emotionally appealing article, a statistical article, or no article. Then, presented with a hypothetical. Table 2 displays the results of the effects of the experimental treatment on participant's philanthropic giving.

Table 2: Experimental Effects on Philanthropic Giving

Treatment	Keep all \$50	Split the \$50	Give all \$50
Emotional Article	10.2% (5)	24.5% (12)	65.3% (32)
Statistical Article	16.7% (8)	20.8% (10)	62.5% (30)
Control	27.7% (13)	29.8% (14)	42.6% (20)

P=0.113

The emotionally appealing article garnered the most donations from all the treatments, with 65.3% donating all \$50 to the organization. Nearly 90% of those who read the emotional article were willing to donate at least some money. The

statistic based article also had encouraging results, with 62.5% of participants donating all of the money and 83.3% donating at least some money. The control treatment saw the least amount of donations, with less than half of the participants donating all of their money to the organization. Furthermore, the percentage of participants in the control treatment donating at least some money was close to twenty points less than those with the emotionally appealing article and eleven points less than those given the statistic based article. These findings support my hypothesis because the participants exposed to the emotionally appealing article were more likely to donate money to an organization researching the coronavirus. However, because the experimental treatments were significantly different from the control, the data suggest that the media framing of the coronavirus was insignificant. But when given an article, the viewers were primed to view the coronavirus as more important, and therefore, more willing to donate.

Ideological Effects on Philanthropic Giving

I examined the effects ideology can have on philanthropic giving by asking the participants to choose the ideology that best describes their own. Then, I compared their ideology to their answer to the hypothetical question. Table 3 synthesizes the responses of those in the control treatment.

Table 3: Ideological Effects on Philanthropic Giving when Given Control Treatment*

Ideology	Keep all \$50	Split the \$50	Give all \$50
Very Conservative	0%	8.3%	0%
Conservative	45.5%	8.3%	15.8%
Moderate	36.4%	8.3%	47.4%
Liberal	18.2%	50%	26.3%
Very Liberal	0%	25%	10.5%
Total	100%	100%	100%

P* < 0.053, is statistically significant with p-value of < 0.1

Of this group, 45.5% of the participants that kept all of the money identified as Conservatives. Three-quarters of the respondents that would donate some of the money identified as liberal or very liberal. While the largest group of participants that would donate all of the money to the organization were moderates (47.74%), conservatives constituted the smallest group with only 15.8%. These findings are statistically significant because the P-Value is less than 0.1. These findings are also important because, as the control group, the participants were not given an article to read before being presented with the hypothetical. Therefore, they were not affected by a treatment. These findings do not align with the existing literature by researchers such as Margolis and Sances who contend that Republicans are more likely to donate money to organizations than their Democrat counterparts (2016).

Tables 4 and 5 display the ideologies of participants and their responses to the hypothetical when given the emotionally appealing article and the statistic based article, respectively. Similar to the findings in Table 3, the conservatives in Table 4 formed the largest group of those that would keep all of their money, and liberals were the largest groups in both donating some and donating all of the

money. The findings in Table 5 were the only ones that did not follow the same patterns as the other two, with conservatives being the smallest group of participants that would keep the money.

Table 4: Ideological Effects on Philanthropic Giving when Given Emotional Article

Ideology	Keep all \$50	Split the \$50	Give all \$50
Very Conservative	-	-	-
Conservative	40%	8.3%	22.6%
Moderate	20%	25%	35.5%
Liberal	20%	25%	32.3%
Very Liberal	20%	41.7%	9.7%
Total	100%	100%	100%

P=0.285

Table 5: Ideological Effects on Philanthropic Giving when Given Statistical Article

Ideology	Keep all \$50	Split the \$50	Give all \$50
Very Conservative	-	-	-
Conservative	12.5%	0%	14.3%
Moderate	62.5%	40%	35.7%
Liberal	0%	50%	28.6%
Very Liberal	25%	10%	21.4%
Total	100%	100%	100%

P=0.3715

While neither of the findings displayed in Tables 4 and 5 is statistically significant, their data should not be disregarded. Because neither had statistically significant findings, it can be inferred that the articles given to these participants mitigated the effects of ideology on philanthropic giving.

Educational Effects on Philanthropic Giving

To measure if educational level affected the participants' philanthropic giving, I asked them to select their education level in the demographics portion of my survey. Both Tables 6, the control treatment, and 7, the emotional treatment,

had no statistically significant findings. This means that the participants' educational level in either of these two treatments did not significantly impact their philanthropic giving, which opposes Trostel's conclusions (2015).

Table 6: Educational Effects on Philanthropic Giving when Given Control Treatment

Education Level	Keep all \$50	Split the \$50	Give all \$50
Less than high school	-	-	-
High school or equiv.	27.3%	0%	15%
Some college, no degree	45.5%	76.9%	40%
Associate's degree	9.1%	7.7%	20%
Bachelor's degree	0%	7.7%	20%
Master's degree	18.2%	7.7%	5%

P=0.220

Table 7: Educational Effects on Philanthropic Giving when Given Emotional Article

Education Level	Keep all \$50	Split the \$50	Give all \$50
Less than high school	0%	0%	3.2%
High school or equiv.	20%	0%	9.7%
Some college, no degree	20%	66.7%	38.7%
Associate's degree	20%	0%	6.5%
Bachelor's degree	20%	16.7%	19.4%
Master's degree	20%	16.7%	22.6%

P=0.711

Unlike the two tables above, Table 8's data (below) does have statistically significant findings since the P-value is less than 0.1. This is significant because 50% of the respondents that kept the \$50 had a high school diploma or equivalent. Of the two groups that would either split or donate all the money, those with high school diplomas or equivalent formed the smallest groups. Also, consistent with Trostel's findings, those with some college but no degree were still more likely to give money than those with associate degrees. The major difference between Trostel and my findings was that those with Master Degrees or higher were not the most philanthropic. Instead, the most

philanthropic participants were ones with some college and no degree. While Table 6 and 7 data are not statistically significant, they also follow this trend.

Table 8: Educational Effects on Philanthropic Giving when Given Statistical Article*

Education Level	Keep all \$50	Split the \$50	Give all \$50
Less than high school	-	-	-
High school or equiv.	50%	10%	3.6%
Some college, no degree	12.5%	20%	35.7%
Associate's Degree	25%	20%	25%
Bachelor's Degree	12.5%	20%	28.6%
Master's Degree	0%	30%	7.1%

P* <0.0271 , is statistically significant with p-value of <0.1

Limitations

A few limitations of this study are the sample type, the lack of diversity in participants, and possible lack of access to the survey. One limitation is that the survey sample was primarily a convenience sample. While I attempted to control this by randomizing what treatment the participants would get, the results are not as generalizable as they could have been if a random sample had been utilized. Consequently, by using a convenience sample, there was a lack of diversification of my participants, primarily white women. Again, this decreases the generalizability of the data on the overall aggregate population of the United States. However, the distribution of my sample in each of my treatments was relatively even, particularly in education and ideology.

Additionally, because the survey was only available online, possible participants that do not have access to the internet were excluded. If this research is to be duplicated, it should feature both an electronic and hard copy that

participants could fill out. Doing so could help diversify the respondents. A final note is that the collection period of surveys fell during the 2020 elections.

Although there is no way to test how this could have affected participants' responses, it should still be mentioned.

Conclusion and Future Implications

In this study, I examined the effects the coronavirus has had on individual philanthropic giving. To answer my research questions of Who is most likely to donate to an organization addressing the coronavirus? Did Covid-19 change donating behavior? Can media coverage of the virus affect donation behavior? I conducted a survey experiment. This study's participants were randomly assigned either an emotionally charged article covering the coronavirus, a statistical article covering the coronavirus, or no article and then presented with a hypothetical question asking about a donation to an organization researching the coronavirus. It is imperative to study how potential donors can be impacted by media priming and framing, as organizations rely on others' generosity to continue their work.

Based on my findings, those exposed to the emotionally appealing article were more likely to donate money than those who received either a statistical article or no article. But the difference of donations between the two articles was minuscule compared to the likelihood of donating by people who read an article versus the people who did not read one. This finding aligns with Iyengar's finding on media priming because the articles made the coronavirus more salient to those

exposed to it and thus made them more generous. However, media framing did not play a significant role in garnering more attention because both articles received a similar number of donations. Perhaps because the virus is so prevalent in our lives, viewers only need a simple reminder of the coronavirus's devastating effects, making the framing less significant.

Another possible explanation for both articles receiving similar donation numbers is that both articles were able to create sympathy bias. This finding would contradict some of the previous literature that argued that sympathy was not triggered by statistics as significantly compared to personal stories. Moreover, it would also suggest that participants with the statistical article were not significantly affected by psychic numbing. This explanation is slightly less possible since numerous studies have suggested that statistics are much less influential than emotional appeals.

The participants' educational level did not play a statistically significant role in influencing whether someone would donate money in most cases. However, in each treatment, people that had completed some college, but had no degree, donated more often than every other group. Even though an Associate's degree is technically higher than people in college without a degree, it does not mean that they have completed more schooling. Because many of my participants were students at a four-year college, they may have more education than those with an Associate's degree, which contributed to them being more likely to donate. Trostel's study shows that people with Bachelor degrees as well as advanced were the most likely to donate, which differs slightly from my findings.

This is encouraging because nonprofits can target a wide array of individuals to solicit donations from.

Unlike some of the literature, my data shows trends that liberals were more likely to donate money than conservatives. A possible explanation is that the coronavirus itself is a very partisan issue. From the beginning of the Coronavirus outbreak in March 2020 until the end of his term, former President Trump and his administration were criticized for their handling of the coronavirus. By not wearing a mask himself, President Trump implicitly messaged to his following that the coronavirus was not as severe of an issue as portrayed by other elected officials who made mask-wearing mandates. Some researchers go as far as to suggest that “[t]he COVID-19 pandemic in the United States is currently as much a political problem as it is a public health problem” (Clinton et al. 2021). If conservatives believe that the coronavirus is not a serious issue, then there would be no reason for them to donate money.

More importantly, in both experimental treatments, the ideology of participants was not statistically significant. But, the control group’s ideology did have statistical significance. This finding suggests that the articles were able to minimize the effects of ideology on philanthropic giving. This could be attributed to both articles creating a sympathy bias, which may be more persuasive than ideology, or that by priming the readers with an article, the coronavirus became more salient, causing them to donate.

Nonprofits should continue utilizing emotionally appealing advertisements to solicit individuals. Although organizations should be mindful of psychic

numbing, the statistical article did not significantly decrease donations compared to the emotional article. Therefore, organizations can continue to use statistics in solicitations for donations without the fear of losing potential donors. Moreover, nonprofits should also keep in mind that even though Americans are constantly surrounded by media coverage of the coronavirus, a single story can influence potential donors. Consequently, organizations should not fear that reaching out to solicit donations using media as long as they are being conscious of their donors. Additionally, nonprofits should target adults that have received at least some college education to increase the likelihood of getting a donation.

The most significant takeaway from my research is that the majority of people are still philanthropic. At least 70% of the participants were willing to donate at least some money to the organizations in all three treatments. While there are many uncertainties in today's coronavirus world, organizations can still count on individual giving to achieve their goals and further their mission.

Suggestions for Future Research

More research is necessary in order to understand factors that influence individual giving. Both of my articles were politically neutral, so future researches should examine if politically framed media about the coronavirus can impact philanthropic giving. In this study, the articles were able to minimize the effects of ideology. Because the coronavirus is such a partisan issue, researchers should examine if a politically framed article about the coronavirus can impact a person's decision to donate. I would hypothesize that when given a conservative frame on the coronavirus, conservatives would be less likely to give. On the other

hand, I believe liberals would still donate in relatively high numbers since they believe the coronavirus is more serious.

Future researchers should also examine if the type of media used to inform consumers of the coronavirus can affect donor behavior. For example, an Instagram post about the coronavirus is more effective than a television commercial. In this case, I think the participants' age would be much more significant than it was in my own research. This is an important area of research since media is being consumed in a myriad of ways. If researchers are able to establish which media platforms are the best at soliciting donations, those platforms can be used more effectively, increasing to organizations' contributed revenue.

Finally, international research on this topic would be interesting to see if the same findings would be similar in different countries. Countries such as Australia had a much better handle on the coronavirus compared to countries like Italy. Would the countries' different experiences with the coronavirus change donor behavior? A global lens on the coronavirus's effect on philanthropic giving would provide a more complete picture of the coronavirus's overall impact. After all, this has been a global pandemic, not solely an American one.

Appendix

Philanthropy Survey

Start of Block: Intro

Q1 You are invited to participate in a survey about philanthropy conducted by Sarah Murphey.

It will take approximately 5 minutes to complete the survey.

If you accept to take this survey, please select the 'Continue' option, where you will be directed to the consent form. After consenting, you will start the survey. **Once you click onto the next page, you will not be able to go back and change your previous answer.**

If you don't want to take this survey, please select the "I do not want to take this survey" option and you will be directed to the end of the survey.

Thank you for your participation.

- Continue
- I do not want to take this survey

Skip To: End of Survey If You are invited to participate in a survey about philanthropy conducted by Sarah Murphey. It wil... = I do not want to take this survey

Page Break

Q2 Please read the following statement. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision about whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Hood College or any of its representatives. If you decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships. Your responses will be kept anonymous and the records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that is published or presentation that is given, it will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. If you have any

questions about the survey and/or to withdraw from the survey at any time, you can contact Sarah Murphey at sjm23@hood.edu.

By clicking consent, I acknowledge that **the information that I provide is confidential and will be used for research purposes only. I am at least eighteen years old. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw anytime without penalty. If I have any concerns about my experience in this study (e.g., that I was treated unfairly or felt unnecessarily threatened), I may contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board at graves@hood.edu or the Chair of the sponsoring department of this research regarding my concerns at tuckerworgs@hood.edu.**

I consent

I do not consent

Skip To: End of Survey If Please read the following statement. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Yo... = I do not consent

Page Break

Q34 The issues listed below are the top ten issues that registered voters categorized as very important issues to their vote in 2020 according to the Pew Research Center. **Rank the issues from least important (1) to most important (10) to you.**

- _____ The coronavirus outbreak (1)
- _____ Economic inequalities (2)
- _____ The economy (3)
- _____ Foreign policy (4)
- _____ Gun policy (5)
- _____ Healthcare (6)
- _____ Immigration (7)
- _____ Racial and ethnic inequalities (8)
- _____ Supreme Court appointments (9)
- _____ Violent crimes (10)

End of Block: Intro

Start of Block: Emotional

E1 Read the following article from the *Detroit News* by Francis X. Donnelly:
'Unimaginable' Pain: Coronavirus Robs Michigan Woman of Whole Family



Grand Blanc — Sandy Brown tried to calm her son, Freddie, alone and scared in a hospital intensive care unit. His father had died a few days earlier. Freddie, just 20, was worried he would die, too.

Talking on FaceTime throughout the night, Sandy recited Scripture and tried to slow his breathing. She sang spiritual songs to coax him to sleep, like a mom singing lullabies to her baby.

One day later, Freddie died.

Imagine awakening from one nightmare only to slip into another.

In three days last week, Brown lost her husband and son, Freddie Lee Brown Jr. and Freddie Lee Brown III, to the novel coronavirus.

"There's not even a word created to describe my pain. It's unimaginable," she said.

The younger Freddie — her "Boopie," her "Sonny Redd" — was her only child, so Brown's family is all gone now.

If the two losses weren't excruciating enough, COVID-19 comes with other tools of torture. It has ravaged every stage of Brown's torment, from the illnesses to the deaths to the grieving. She couldn't comfort her husband and son. She couldn't say goodbye.

Even in death, the virus hasn't relinquished its hold.

It made a mockery of funeral arrangements Friday. And it deprived Brown from receiving what she needs most right now, which is a hug.

Page Break

E2 Complete the hypothetical.

You are given \$50 and the opportunity to donate to an organization researching the coronavirus. Which action would you take?

- I would keep the \$50.
- I would split the \$50 between the organization and myself.
- I would give the \$50 to the organization.

Page Break

Display This Question:

If Complete the hypothetical. You are given \$50 and the opportunity to donate to an organization res... = I would keep the \$50.

E3 Select all options that best describe why you kept the \$50.

- I do not have the financial means to donate the money.
 - I would rather volunteer for the organization.
 - I would rather give my money to loved ones.
 - I do not think my contribution would be effective.
 - There are other causes I would rather give my money to.
 - Other
-

Display This Question:

If Complete the hypothetical. You are given \$50 and the opportunity to donate to an organization res... = I would split the \$50 between the organization and myself.

Q26 How would you split the \$50 between you and the organization?

To myself : _____

To the organization : _____

Total : _____

Page Break

Display This Question:

If Complete the hypothetical. You are given \$50 and the opportunity to donate to an organization res... = I would split the \$50 between the organization and myself.

Or Complete the hypothetical. You are given \$50 and the opportunity to donate to an organization res... = I would give the \$50 to the organization.

E5 Select all options that best describe why you donated money to the organization.

I have the financial means to donate the money.

There are people who would benefit more from the money than me.

I think my contribution would be effective.

This is the most important cause I want to give my money to.

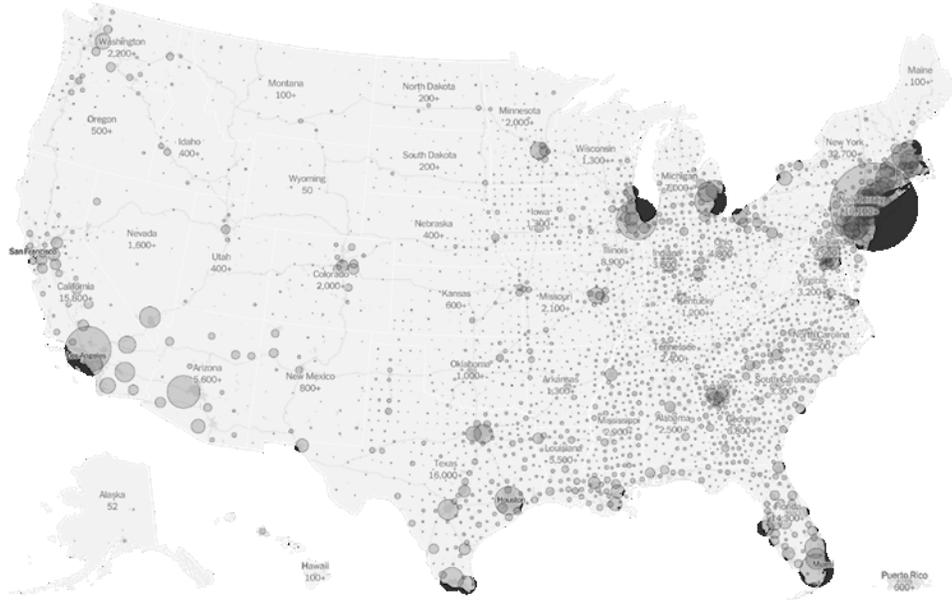
Giving makes me feel good.

Other

End of Block: Emotional

Start of Block: Statistical

I1 Read the following article from *The New York Times*:
Covid in the U.S.: Latest Map and Case Count



Deaths by counties in the United States

At least 918 new coronavirus deaths and 43,470 new cases were reported in the United States on Sept. 29. Over the past week, there have been an average of 43,144 cases per day, an increase of 13 percent from the average two weeks earlier.

As of Wednesday evening, more than 7,259,400 people in the United States have been infected with the coronavirus and at least 206,700 have died, according to a New York Times database.

Case numbers remain persistently high across much of the country, though reports of new cases have dropped considerably since late July, when the country averaged well over 60,000 per day.

States in the Northeast, where infections were highest this spring, have reported relatively low case numbers for months. Some places that suffered the most in early summer, including Arizona, Florida and California, have since seen steep declines. But some of that progress has been offset by rising case numbers on the Great Plains and in some Southern states.

Deaths, though still well below their peak spring levels, averaged around 850 per day in mid September, far more than were reported in early July.

American life has been fundamentally reordered because of the virus. Concerts, parades and high school football games continue to be called off. Countless people have found themselves jobless and struggling to afford housing.

Page Break

Display This Question:

If Complete the hypothetical. You are given \$50 and the opportunity to donate to an organization res... = I would keep the \$50.

I3 Select all options that best describe why you kept the \$50.

- I do not have the financial means to donate the money.
 - I would rather volunteer for the organization.
 - I would rather give my money to loved ones.
 - I do not think my contribution would be effective.
 - There are other causes I would rather give my money to.
 - Other
-

Page Break

Display This Question:

If Complete the hypothetical. You are given \$50 and the opportunity to donate to an organization res... = I would split the \$50 between the organization and myself.

I4 How would you split the \$50?

To myself : _____

To the organization : _____

Total : _____

Page Break

If Complete the hypothetical. You are given \$50 and the opportunity to donate to an organization res... = I would split the \$50 between the organization and myself.

Or Complete the hypothetical. You are given \$50 and the opportunity to donate to an organization res... = I would give the \$50 to the organization.

I5 Select all options that best describe why you donated money to the organization.

- I have the financial means to donate the money.
 - There are people who would benefit from the money more than me.
 - I think my contribution would be effective.
 - This is the most important cause I want to give my money to.
 - Giving makes me feel good.
 - Other
-

End of Block: Statistical

Start of Block: Control

C1 Complete the hypothetical.

You are given \$50 and the opportunity to donate to an organization researching the coronavirus. Which action would you take?

- I would keep the \$50.
- I would split the \$50 between the organization and myself.
- I would give the \$50 to the organization.

Page Break

Display This Question:

If Complete the hypothetical. You are given \$50 and the opportunity to donate to an organization res... = I would keep the \$50.

C2 Select all options that best describe why you kept the \$50.

- I do not have the financial means to donate the money.
 - I would rather volunteer for the organization.
 - I would rather give my money to loved ones.
 - I do not think my contribution would be effective.
 - There are other causes I would rather give my money to.
 - Other
-

Page Break

Display This Question:

If Complete the hypothetical. You are given \$50 and the opportunity to donate to an organization res... = I would split the \$50 between the organization and myself.

C3 How would you split the \$50?

To myself : _____

To the organization : _____

Total : _____

Page Break

Display This Question:

If Complete the hypothetical. You are given \$50 and the opportunity to donate to an organization res... = I would split the \$50 between the organization and myself.

Or Complete the hypothetical. You are given \$50 and the opportunity to donate to an organization res... = I would give the \$50 to the organization.

C5 Select all options that best describe why you donated money to the organization.

I have the financial means to donate the money.

There are other people who would benefit more from the money than me.

I think my contribution would be effective.

This is the most important cause that I want to give my money to.

Giving makes me feel good.

Other _____

Page Break

End of Block: Control

Start of Block: Demographics

Q8 Have you donated money to an organization within the past year?

Yes

No

Page Break

Q9 Will you donate money to an organization within the next year?

Yes

No

Page Break

Q10 How do you agree with the following statement?

Donating money is the most effective way to help an organization.

Strongly agree

Agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Page Break

Q11 Rank the reasons for donating from **least important (1) to most important (6)**.

- _____ I trust the organization to use my money effectively.
_____ I feel compassionate about what the organization is addressing.
_____ My friends and/or family donates to organizations.
_____ It gives me a tax incentive.
_____ It makes me feel important.
_____ I feel that the government is doing an adequate job addressing the issue.
-

Page Break

Q12 Have you had the coronavirus or do you know someone who has/had the virus?

- Yes
 No
-

Page Break

Q13 Select your age group.

- 18-25
 26-43
 44-54
 55-65
 66-74
 75+
-

Page Break

Q14 What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other _____

Page Break

Q15 What is your highest level of education?

- Less than a high school diploma
- High school diploma or equivalent
- Some college, no degree
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate

Page Break

Q16 What was your household income last year?

- Less than \$25,000
- \$25,000-\$39,999
- \$40,000-\$54,999
- \$55,000-\$69,999
- \$70,000-\$84,999
- \$85,000-\$99,999
- \$100,000+

Page Break

Q17 What is your present religion, if any?

- Atheism/Agnostic
- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism
- None
- Other _____
- Prefer not to say

Page Break

Q18 Do you attend religious services weekly?

Yes

No

Page Break

Q19 What is your ethnicity?

White

Black or African American

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Other

Page Break

Q20 Which ideology best applies to you?

Very conservative

Conservative

Moderate

Liberal

Very liberal

End of Survey

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