https://doi.org/10.37420/j.ssp.2024.015

A Review of Individual Donation Behavior and Repeated Donation Intentions

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Abstract
Charitable donations constitute a pivotal aspect of social welfare undertakings and represent a critical link in the third distribution mechanism. Social donations primarily originate from individual and corporate contributions. Although the proportion of individual donations varies across countries, they embody the most dynamic segment of social giving. Enhancing individual donations is crucial for promoting the widespread adoption of a "charity for all" mindset and bolstering the overall strength of social philanthropy. This review synthesizes existing research from both internal and external factors influencing individual donors, identifies gaps in the literature, and aims to provide guidance for future studies, serving as a catalyst for further exploration.

Keywords
Donation motivation, repeated donations, literature review

1 Introduction

In November 2022, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized the vision of steadfastly advancing common prosperity in the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, highlighting the importance of improving the distribution system, particularly the construction of a coordinated system encompassing primary distribution, redistribution, and tertiary distribution. Among these, the enhancement of tertiary distribution is closely linked to the development of philanthropy, which plays a crucial role in alleviating poverty and assisting vulnerable groups. Maximizing the effectiveness of philanthropy in tertiary distribution and stimulating social donation vitality, especially individual donations—the most dynamic component of social donations, constitute key challenges that urgently need to be addressed. Therefore, delving into how to effectively motivate individual donation behavior and promote repeat donations from donors holds profound theoretical value and rich practical significance.

2 Research on Individual Donation Intention

In the context of consumer donation behavior, based on the nature of the donated items, it can be subdivided into various forms such as blood and organ donation, monetary donation, commodity donation (including the donation of used items), and time donation (i.e., volunteering) (Bachke, 2014) [1]. This paper focuses specifically on the phenomenon of repeated monetary donations. Identifying the key factors that stimulate consumers' willingness to donate is of great significance for nonprofit organizations to effectively attract generous donors and thus enhance fundraising efficiency (Bekkers, 2006) [2]. Current research categorizes the motivations behind consumers' donation willingness broadly into two main categories: personal factors and social factors.

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2.1 The impact of demographic factors on donation intention

From the perspective of individual consumer factors, early studies primarily investigated the influence of demographic variables on individuals' willingness to donate. Lee's empirical analysis of public donation data in Taiwan revealed that an individual's age, gender, income, marital status, and family burden significantly impact their donation willingness (Lee, 2008) [3]. This viewpoint has subsequently been empirically supported by several scholars. For instance, Grace and Griffin (2009) [4] found in their study in Hungary that married middle-aged individuals with higher education exhibited stronger donation willingness, a group typically characterized by higher social status. Einolf (2011) [5], using data from the Midlife in the United States (MIDUS) survey to test hypotheses, pointed out that different genders exhibit distinct characteristics in monetary donations; specifically, women, despite having fewer social capital resources, demonstrate higher altruistic motivations and empathy (Lwin, 2013) [6]. However, studies such as that by Zhu Jianggang (2020) [7] have indicated that donation willingness does not show significant differences across varying levels of household disposable income, highlighting the importance of conducting field research in specific contexts alongside panel data analysis.

2.2 The impact of personality traits on donation intention

Apart from demographic variables, personal factors in consumer donation also encompass the significant dimension of personality traits. Personality traits refer to the relatively stable patterns of behavior, thinking, and emotional attitudes that individuals exhibit across various situations and over time (Ashton, 2020) [8]. The differences in personality traits among individuals lead to varied perceptions of things, subsequently influencing their willingness to donate. For instance, in the Big Five personality traits framework, individuals high in conscientiousness not only exhibit greater organization in the workplace (compared to those lower in conscientiousness) but also demonstrate care and consideration for people and things in their lives (Jensen, 2002) [9], tending to invest more money and energy in charitable causes (Claxton, 2010) [10]. Furthermore, individuals with extraverted personalities are more likely to access social resources (Lee, 2004) [11], thereby having more opportunities to engage in charitable donations (Ashton, 2007) [12]. Additionally, individuals with stronger empathic abilities also tend to exhibit helpful behaviors (Lee, 2005) [13].

2.3 The impact of perceived situations on donation intention

Lastly, personal donation willingness is closely related to individuals' experiences, immediate emotions, and perceptions of specific environments. For example, a survey of corporate executives revealed that those who experienced hardships or significant setbacks in their childhood are more likely to develop a willingness to donate after accumulating wealth (Xu Nianhang, 2016) [14]. Similarly, research by Liu Jiankun (2021) [15] found that individuals with disaster experiences are more restrained in their expenditure on enjoyment but more frequent in their donation behaviors. Furthermore, numerous studies have confirmed that consumers' immediate emotions significantly influence their willingness to donate. As early as the last century, scholars discovered that individuals are more likely to make donations under both positive and negative emotional states compared to a neutral state (Cialdini, 1981) [16]. Subsequent research has further revealed that presenting the tragic situation of beneficiaries can evoke consumers' guilt over past wasteful or indulgent behaviors, prompting them to donate (Bagozzi, 1994) [17]. Conversely, eliciting positive emotions in do-

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nors, such as praising their good deeds for bringing hope and other positive changes to beneficiaries, can stimulate consumers' achievement motivation and prosocial motivation, thereby increasing their benevolent actions (Clark, 1982) [18]. With technological advancements, research methods on immediate emotions are also continuously innovating, such as using electroencephalogram (EEG) monitoring (Guo, 2014) [34] and eye-tracking (Grinstein, 2019) [19] to observe the impact of emotional fluctuations on donation willingness more precisely. Whether through traditional offline donation methods or emerging online crowdfunding models fueled by digital technological advancements, individuals' perceptions of the authenticity of beneficiary information significantly influence their donation willingness (Cui Kaiyun, 2024) [20]. Moreover, beyond the beneficiaries themselves, consumers' perceptions are also influenced by their involvement in the charitable project process and experiences. For instance, if access to charitable projects is convenient, connections with project organizers and beneficiaries are easily established, or charitable promotions are prominently displayed and the donation process is straightforward, these factors enhance consumers' perceptions of the accessibility and participation in the project, subsequently affecting their donation decisions through the mediating role of self-efficacy (Hou Jundong, 2009) [35]. In summary, numerous personal factors influence consumer donations, and the academic community has conducted deep and extensive research on this topic.

2.4 Social factors influencing individual donation intention

The external factors influencing consumers' willingness to donate can be broadly categorized as social factors. Social norms and peer influence are two social factors closely linked to charitable giving. Historically, benevolence and kindness have been regarded as integral parts of morality (Ren Jiandong, 2008) [21]. As social beings, individuals with a good moral reputation can earn additional favors in both their professional and daily lives (Jøsang, 2007) [22]. Therefore, portraying donors as individuals with a "high sense of morality" through narrative means may lead to increased charitable donations (Yang Jiao, 2024). [23] Additionally, individuals need to demonstrate a certain degree of "moral self-verification" in social interactions to maintain social connections and evaluations, and the failure to donate may expose some individuals to "moral pressure" (Zhu Xianchen, 2008) [24]. Thus, social moral pressure can motivate individuals to donate. Peer influence also has a significant effect on individual donation behavior. The results of a field experiment show that individuals in groups where peer donation amounts were disclosed donated significantly more than those in groups where such information was not disclosed. This finding robustly demonstrates the promoting effect of peer reference on individual donation behavior (Wang Zhengwei, 2023) [25]. Furthermore, Shang (2008) [26] conducted three laboratory experiments to verify the impact of "identity consistency" on donor behavior, revealing that participants tended to donate more when informed that others with the same identity had made large donations. Collectively, these studies reveal that peers not only stimulate donation behavior but also trigger competitive altruism (Böhm & Regner, 2013) [27], where individuals compete to increase their donation amounts to gain an advantage in ranking and social reputation.

3 Factors influencing individual repeated donation intention

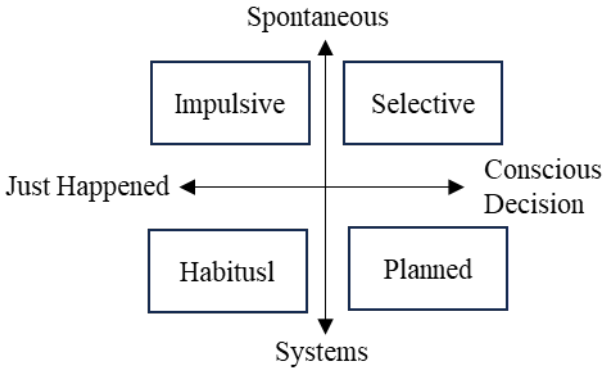
Repeated donation, in brief, refers to the behavior of a donor contributing money to the same charitable project for a second or multiple times. It should be clarified that this study excludes donations to similar

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https://doi.org/10.37420/j.ssp.2024.015

crowdfunding projects (e.g., medical assistance projects on Waterdrop Fund) on the same platform. Consistent with the scope of research on initial donations, this paper focuses on voluntary monetary donations, excluding special cases such as mandatory donations and collective donations.

Herzog and Price (2016) [32] employed a fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) method to classify donors based on two dimensions: the systematic versus spontaneous nature of donation behavior,



and whether the donation decision was a conscious decision or made randomly without planning. Based on these two dimensions, four categories of donors were identified. The specific classification is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Different types of donors.

Among the four categories of donors, the most favored are the "Planned" ones. Therefore, to cultivate such donors, it is necessary to analyze the factors that promote their continued donations. The existing literature discusses the motivations for repeated donations primarily from three perspectives.

3.1 The impact of nonprofit organization brand equity on repeated donations

Firstly, starting from the perspective of non-profit organizations (NPOs), whether an individual will make repeated donations to the same charitable project depends on the strength of the NPO's brand equity that promotes the project. Building on previous research, Aaker (2012) [33] proposed a five-star model of "brand equity," which consists of brand awareness, brand reputation, brand associations, brand loyalty, and other proprietary brand assets. A strong brand reputation for an NPO serves a crucial function in coordinating, monitoring, and organizing relationships with its stakeholders, thereby fostering enduring connections with donors (Shuai Junquan, 2019) [28]. Conversely, if an organization is involved in a scandal, it can severely damage its reputation and significantly demotivate donors (Liu Chunxiang, 2016) [29].

3.2 The impact of charity projects and the effectiveness of fundraising messages on repeated donations

Secondly, the discussion on repeated donation motivations also encompasses the perceived characteristics of charitable projects, specifically in three aspects: Firstly, projects with advanced design concepts and high resource utilization can exert lasting appeal to donors (Lan Yuxin, 2022) [30]. For instance, efficient "strategies" such as matching donations can make donors feel the effectiveness, prompting them to participate

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in regular donations. Secondly, projects with low thresholds and easy participation processes ensure high accessibility and engagement (Hou Jundong, 2009) [35]. Lastly, transparency in the flow of charitable funds enhances donors' trust in NPOs, thereby promoting continued donations (Jin Bihua, 2020) [31].

Finally, the effectiveness of charitable fundraising messages also influences individuals' repeated donations. Current research has provided a relatively comprehensive discussion on the factors influencing individuals' donation intentions. However, there is a lack of sufficient empirical validation, and studies have only examined the impact of single factors on repeated donations without exploring the combined effects of multiple factors and the mechanisms underlying their influence on repeated donation intentions. Moreover, the influence of personal traits has been overlooked.

4 Gaps in existing literature and future research directions

In the existing academic research on donation motives, the majority of studies have focused on one-time donations, while research on repeated donations remains relatively scarce.The existing literature on one-time donation motives is extensive, covering various aspects from motives to mechanisms. Therefore, this study innovatively integrates marketing and psychology by introducing the variables of perceived credibility and response efficacy to explore which factors and mechanisms can influence repeated donations.

Regarding international research, in-depth explorations of repeated donations primarily concentrated in the period from 2005 to 2015. In recent years, however, there has been a lack of novel research perspectives in this field, and few studies have successfully incorporated emerging theories to explore and uncover new mechanisms of repeated donations.

In terms of domestic research, a search through academic databases such as China National Knowledge Internet (CNKI) reveals that direct research literature on "repeated donations" is extremely limited, with only two journal articles found. A search for "continuous donations," a concept closely related to repeated donations, yields a total of 31 journal articles and 32 dissertations in CNKI. However, upon in-depth analysis, it becomes evident that most of these studies focus on corporate donation behavior, while specialized research on individual continuous donations is particularly scarce.

In summary, from the perspective of research quantity, both domestic and international studies on repeated donations in recent years have shown significant deficiencies. From the theoretical perspective, existing research also lags behind, failing to fully absorb and integrate the latest theoretical developments to deepen the understanding and interpretation of repeated donation behavior. Therefore, this paper will adopt the nudge theory perspective and employ methods such as online experiments to delve into the intrinsic mechanisms that motivate donors to make repeated donations. It aims to analyze the key factors that play a role in promoting the transition from single to repeated donation behavior among donors, with the goal of advancing the development of charitable donations.

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