

The Influence of Branding on Charity Advertising and Fundraising Effectiveness

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In this paper, we describe a study designed to contribute to the stream of research on nonprofit brand-related topics. Specifically, we develop and test a conceptual model to add to our knowledge of the influences of brand familiarity, brand remarkability, and brand attitudes on audience support intentions (donation intentions, word-of-mouth intentions, and social network sharing intentions). We also examined the moderation influences of perceived donor risk, value congruence, and evoked sympathy. A sample of 266 individuals completed an online questionnaire. Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM. We found that brand familiarity's influence on audience support intentions was fully mediated by brand attitudes and moderated by brand remarkability. We also found that brand attitudes' influence on social network sharing intentions was moderated by perceived donor risk. Additional findings are presented. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

Fundraising, Charity advertising, Brand management, Nonprofit marketing

Introduction

Traditionally, charities often relied on advertising as an important tactic for presenting messages to audiences, often for the purpose of attracting donations (Wymer et al., 2006). A common practice in charity advertising was to present images of vulnerable people (often children) to evoke sympathy or pity in the audience to motivate them to donate to the charity (Baberini et al., 2015; Bae, 2019). In addition to constructing charity appeals to evoke audience sympathy, researchers have sought ways to make charity appeals even more effective, such as examining spokesperson effects or message framing (Jiang et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2024).

In contrast, comparatively less attention has focused on the influence of organizational factors on audience responsiveness to messaging. In their literature review of charity advertising, Wymer and Gross (2023) recommended that future research is needed to fill a knowledge gap on the influence of organizational characteristics on charity messaging effectiveness.

In addition to the gap identified on the influence of organizational factors in the charity advertising research stream, nonprofit marketing scholars have called for a greater emphasis on brand-related topics (Apaydin, 2011; Romero & Abril, 2023). Sepulcri et al. (2020) recommended future research on organizational factors that influence donations like branding. Hence, there is a literature gap in the charity advertising and nonprofit marketing research streams in our knowledge of how branding influences an organization's messaging

effectiveness in attracting manifestations of audience support (e.g., donations, social media likes and shares).

To help fill this literature gap, Wymer and Yacout (2024) examined the influence of three brand-related organizational constructs on a sample of Generation Z (Gen Z, born 1995-2010) respondents. They examined the influence on brand familiarity, brand remarkability, and brand attitudes on three audience response variables: donation intentions, intentions to make favorable comments on social media, and intentions to share the fundraising campaign on social media. The investigators' conceptual model also included two moderators: personal impulsiveness and social media engagement. They found that the influences of brand remarkability and brand familiarity on the outcome variables were mediated through their influence on brand attitudes. With respect to potential moderation effects, their results were not significant.

Wymer and Yacout's (2024) findings contributed to nonprofit brand research. More research is needed in nonprofit branding to learn more about how nonprofit organizations can create stronger relationships with donors, volunteers, and beneficiaries (do Paço et al., 2014; Sepulcri et al., 2020). While the practical use of branding in the nonprofit sector is growing, extant research is fragmented, and more systematic research is needed to provide a clearer and more coherent understanding of the field (Werke & Bogale, 2024).

Replication studies help to reduce fragmentation in the literature by verifying previous findings, helping to support reliability and validity of prior research, helping to identify errors or biases, and helping to improve our theoretical understanding (National Academy of Science, 2019). Specifically, we replicate and extend the findings of Wymer and Yacout (2024). Like Wymer and Yacout (2024) we examine the influences of brand familiarity, brand remarkability, and brand attitudes on audience outcomes. This replication provides an opportunity to examine the robustness and reliability of the nonprofit brand construct relationships reported in Wymer and Yacout (2024). Wymer and Yacout (2024) noted that a limitation of their research was their sample of Gen Z participants (students at an Egyptian university). The focus of our study is not on the Gen Z cohort, but on the general population.

Additionally, whereas Wymer and Yacout (2024) used a simple print format for their message channel, we use a video format as our message channel. Nonprofit organizations increasingly rely on disseminating their appeals in video format on social media (Seo & Vu, 2020; Yousef et al., 2021). Examining the nonprofit brand construct relationships in a different format on a different population may enhance the external validity of Wymer and Yacout's (2024) findings.

Furthermore, we extend the work of Wymer and Yacout (2024) who examined two potential moderators: impulsiveness and social media engagement. In our study, we investigate the potential moderating influences of value congruence, evoked sympathy, and perceived donor risk.

In sum, we re-examine the nonprofit brand construct relationships of Wymer and Yacout (2024) on a different sample, not limited to a single generational cohort. We re-examine these relationships using a different message, using different brands, and using a different messaging format. We also investigate the moderation effects of three different constructs.

Literature Review

As noted in the introduction, we are interested in investigating the influence of brand-related organizational factors on an audience's responsiveness to a nonprofit organization's message appeal. An organization's brand is a latent psychological construct that refers to the perceptions, associations, and meaning of the organization in the minds of priority audiences (individuals whose engagement and support the organization seeks to acquire and retain) (Wymer, 2013; Wymer & Casidy, 2019).

In this investigation, we are interested in three focal brand constructs: brand familiarity, brand remarkability, and brand attitudes. Brand familiarity refers to the level of knowledge a priority

audience has about the nonprofit organization. Brand remarkability refers to the degree to which a nonprofit organization is perceived by a priority audience to be extraordinary and exceptional. We define brand attitudes as the degree to which a nonprofit organization is perceived favorably by a priority audience (Wymer et al., 2016).

Sponsoring Charity Brand

Charity advertisements feature a sponsoring charity for which the ad is requesting support, often in the form of donations (Wymer & Gross, 2023). A weak charity brand would be expected to have lower brand familiarity than a strong brand (Wymer et al., 2016). We operationalized this effect in our model by having two charity brands, one fictitious (unknown charity brand) and a well-known charity brand. Hence, the sponsoring charity brand will be operationalized as a two-condition dummy variable.

Familiarity with a charity is the result of information about the brand and brand experiences. Sources of brand information may be from the charity or from other sources. Charities send fundraising appeals to audiences which familiarizes audiences with their work, beliefs, and values (Sargeant, Hudson, & West, 2008). We predict that an established charity will experience greater brand familiarity than a fictitious charity.

H1: An established charity will have greater brand familiarity than a fictitious charity.

Brand Familiarity

People tend to donate to charities with which they are familiar (García-Madariaga et al., 2024; Ha et al., 2024). Bourassa and Stang (2016) found that knowledge about a charity moderates the effects of trust, transparency, and accountability on donation behavior. Perhaps this effect is due to the influence of familiarity on trust. Wymer et al. (2021) wrote that well-known charities are more trusted than less-known charities and that people tend to have greater trust in organizations with which they are familiar. García-Madariaga et al. (2024) reported that brand familiarity influenced the way in which audience members process print ads. Familiarity with a charity provides a context that aids in an audience's comprehension of its messages and appeals (Ha et al., 2022). Wymer and Yacout (2024) reported that brand familiarity influenced supporter outcome variables. Based on this prior research, it is reasonable to believe that brand familiarity will have an effect on our outcome variables.

H2: Brand familiarity has a positive influence on audience support intentions.

Brand Attitudes

Prior consumer branding research has found that brand attitudes have a positive effect on brand equity (Chang & Liu, 2009). Ebrahim (2013) reported that brand preferences are a manifestation of brand attitudes. Boubker and Douayri (2020) found that brand attitudes predicted brand preference which predicted purchase intentions.

Recent research has found that people's attitudes toward a charity's brand are linked to their intentions to donate. For example, Ramayanti (2025) reported that attitudes towards a charity influenced donation intentions and mediated the influence of brand orientation on donation intentions. Wymer and Yacout (2024) found that charity brand attitudes influenced audience outcomes, including donation intentions. Prior research has reported similar influence of charity brand attitudes on donation intentions (Smith & McSweeney, 2007; Teah et al., 2014).

H3: Brand attitudes have a positive influence on audience support intentions.

As brand familiarity increases, individuals develop their attitudes toward the brand (Junior Ladeira et al., 2022). Prior research has found that brand attitudes can serve a mediational role. For example, Gregory et al. (2020) reported that charity brand salience is positively related to charity brand choice intention through the mediating effect of brand attitudes. Prior research has found that when attitudes are improved, intentions to donate are boosted (Lee & Kim, 2023). Attitudes toward charities have been found to be good predictors of donation intentions (Erlandsson et al., 2018). Prior research supports the role that brand familiarity has on attitude formation (Auschaitrakul and Mukherjee, 2017; Boronczyk and Breuer, 2020; Catalán et al., 2019; Herédia-Colaço et al., 2019; Li et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2021). Wymer and Yacout (2024) reported that brand familiarity's influence on supporter intentions was partially mediated through brand attitudes. Hence, we predict a replication of Wymer and Yacout's (2024), that brand familiarity's influence on our audience support intentions will be (partially or fully) mediated through its influence on brand attitudes.

H4: Brand attitudes mediate brand familiarity's influence on audience support intentions.

Brand Remarkability

As discussed above, brand familiarity aids in the development of brand attitudes. As one becomes more familiar with an organization, one begins to form attitudes about the organization. One's perceptions of the degree of organizational exceptionalism also aids in attitude development. Brand attitudes pertain to how strongly one likes or dislikes a brand. Brand remarkability concerns the degree to which one perceives a brand to be exceptional and superior (Wymer, 2015). Charities are generally known to do good work, often helping others, or reducing suffering. Hence, most people tend to have positive attitudes toward most charities (AFP, 2021). While attitudes towards charities are important, individuals prefer to support charities they perceive as exceptional and superior (Wymer & Casidy, 2019). Hence, brand remarkability exerts an influence on brand attitudes.

H5: Brand remarkability has a positive influence on brand attitudes.

There is an interaction between brand familiarity and brand remarkability and their shared influence on the formation of brand attitudes (Wymer & Casidy, 2019). Low and Lamb (2000) reported a relationship among brand familiarity, brand quality, and brand attitudes. Familiarity with a charity facilitates the formation of attitudes towards that charity. The more one knows about a charity, the more one can determine the degree to which that charity is perceived favorably (Junior Ladeira et al., 2022). However, the more remarkable a charity is perceived to be, the more brand remarkability positively influences brand attitudes. Brand familiarity may have a positive influence on brand attitudes. However, that familiarity helps to shape perceptions of brand remarkability. As one becomes more familiar with an organization, one's perception of the organization's exceptionalism can influence the valence and magnitude of brand attitudes. The formation of strong positive charity attitudes requires an audience to be somewhat familiar with a charity and then perceive the charity to be exceptional (Werke & Bogale, 2023).

H6: Brand remarkability moderates brand familiarity's influence on brand attitudes.

Evoked Sympathy

Evoked sympathy refers to the stimulation of individuals' feelings of pity and sorrow for the misfortune of victims featured in a fundraising appeal. It is an emotional response that is elicited in individuals when they witness or learn about misfortune or suffering (Vossen, Piotrowski, & Valkenburg, 2015). Charity advertising often seeks to stimulate sympathetic feelings among audience members for the unfortunates featured in charity fundraising ads (Wymer & Gross, 2023). Studies have reported that evoking feelings of pity for a victim influences donation intentions (Baberini et al., 2015; Bae, 2019; Homer, 2021; Sudhir, Roy, & Cherian, 2016).

Although portraying victims or suffering is often used in charity appeals, its use has been criticized as exploitative (Ong, 2015). If audiences perceive the charity to have manipulative intentions, the audiences' responses may be negatively affected (Kang, Leliveld, & Ferraro, 2022). Generally, however, charities feel that evoking audience sympathy is important in motivating donations that can help victims (Homer, 2021). In their analysis of charity ads, Mittelman and Neilson (2011) reported that the ads tended to show the hardships faced by victims but did not exceed the limit into what might be considered exploitative. The somewhat negative evoked emotion is often coupled with positive message framing to show the potential ameliorative effects for the victims from audience support (Wymer & Gross, 2023). Although evoked sympathy is commonly used in charity advertising, audiences are also influenced by audience attitudes toward the charity (Wymer & Gross, 2023). Hence, it is likely that the appeal's ability to evoke sympathy will interact with the audience's perceived charity brand attitudes.

H7: Evoked sympathy moderates the influence of brand attitudes on audience support intentions.

Perceived Donor Risk

Perceived donor risk refers to the degree to which a person believes it is likely that something unfavorable may happen if a donation is made (Wymer & Najev Čačija, 2023). Perceived risk that the charity will not use the donation properly or effectively may negatively influence donation intentions (Exley, 2016). Beldad et al. (2014) found that perceived risk of donating negatively influences repeat donation intentions. The influence of perceived donor risk on charity donations may explain why trust has been found in the literature to be associated with donation behavior (Chapman et al., 2021; Werke & Bogale, 2023).

There is an antagonistic relationship between trust and risk (Paulssen et al., 2014). As trust increases, perceived risk decreases; and as trust decreases, perceived risk increases. Prior brand research has reported this antagonistic relationship between brand image/reputation and customer trust (Power et al., 2008; Zatwarnicka-Madura et al., 2016). In the fundraising literature, trust in a charity's brand has been found to influence donation intentions (Bilgin & Kethüda, 2022). When individuals have favorable brand attitudes, they are more likely to perceive it as trustworthy (Srivastava, 2020). Favorable brand attitudes reduce audience skepticism and help build confidence in the organization's ability to effectively use donations (Lopes et al., 2024). Based on the prior literature, it is reasonable to predict that perceived donor risk will interact with brand attitudes' influence on audience support intentions. That is, as perceived donor risk increases, the influence of brand attitudes on audience support intentions should decrease.

H8: The influence of brand attitudes on audience support intentions is negatively moderated by perceived brand trust.

Value Congruence

Value congruence refers to individuals' perceptions of the degree to which their values are like those of an organization, such as a charity presenting a donation appeal (Peng, Pandey, & Pandey, 2015; Wymer, Becker, & Boenigk, 2021). Prior research has reported that value expressive attitudes are key determinants of volunteering and donating to charities (Sneddon, Evers, & Lee, 2020). People are more likely to donate to organizations that align with their own values (Gardner & Pierce, 2022; van Dijk et al., 2019). Conversely, the discovery of an incongruence between a charity's values and supporters' values can lead to negative outcomes (Sanderson, 2021).

An organization's brand is a manifestation of stakeholder group perceptions of how they conceive the organization (Wymer et al., 2016). An organization's values are included in audience perceptions of their conceptualizations of the organization, the organization's brand (Sargeant et al., 2008). In the consumer behavior literature, the value congruence between consumers and a brand influences the consumer-brand relationship quality (Elsharnouby et al., 2024). You and Hon (2021) reported that a company's reputation interacted with value congruence to stimulate favorable word-of-mouth referrals from consumers.

With respect to charities, people form attitudes about a charity based on their perceptions of its values and how they are reflected in its brand (da Silva et al., 2020). Hence, there is likely an interaction effect between brand attitudes and value congruence. Brand attitudes are likely to be influenced by an individual's attitudes toward the values inherent in the brand's meaning. A perceived value congruence between an individual and a nonprofit brand may amplify the influence of brand attitudes.

H9: The influence of brand attitudes on audience support intentions is moderated by value congruence.

Audience Support Intentions

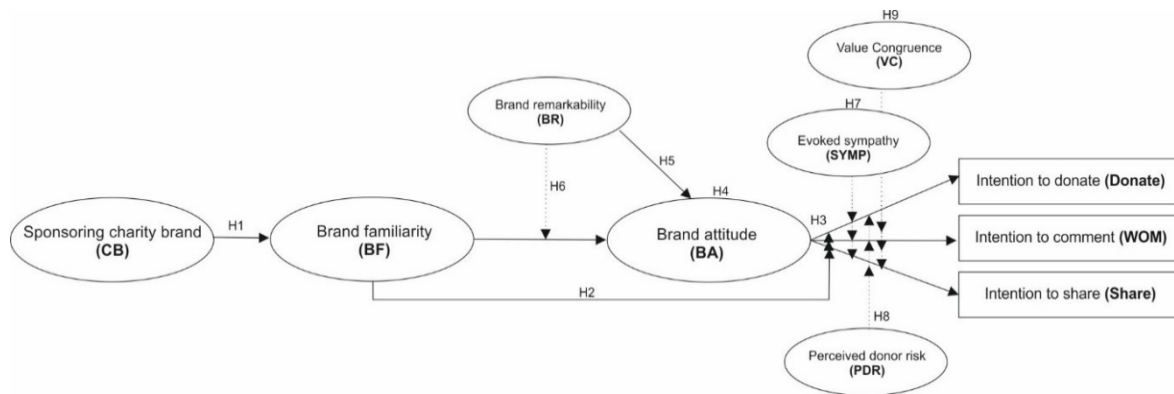
Outcomes are the desired effects from an organization's communication activities. In practice, charities use marketing activities to attain desired benefits or outcomes, such as persuading audience members to provide support. Charities seek support from individuals in a variety of ways like donating, volunteering, word-of-mouth referrals, and so forth (Peloza & Hassay, 2007).

We follow examples in prior nonprofit marketing research to include multiple outcome variables to enrich our understanding of phenomena under investigation (Bennett & Barkensjo, 2005; Wymer & Rundle-Thiele, 2016). In our study, we include three audience support intention variables from Wymer and Yacout (2024). They are donation intentions, positive word-of-mouth (WOM) intentions, and social media sharing intentions. Behavioral intentions are one of the most widely used constructs in consumer research and one of the best predictors of behavior (Lee, Kotler, & Colehour, 2024; Morwitz & Munz, 2021). Donation intentions are the most used outcome variable in prior charity advertising research (Wymer & Gross, 2023).

Donation intentions refer to individuals' plans to donate money to the sponsoring charity (Kashif et al., 2015). Positive word-of-mouth (WOM) intentions refers to individuals' plans to make positive comments and referrals to others about the charity and its campaign (Schlesinger et al., 2023). Social media sharing intentions refers to individuals' plans to share the campaign appeal on their social media pages (Kim et al., 2020).

To attain our desired contributions to gaps in this research stream, we developed and tested the conceptual model presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual model



Next, we report a study we conducted to test these hypothesized relationships.

Methods and Procedures

Data collection procedures were approved by the appropriate ethics review board. We used a one-minute video fundraising appeal and created two versions of the appeal by using a different charity sponsor in each. World Wildlife Fund (WWF), a well-known and established charity brand used in prior research (Wymer, McDonald, & Scaife, 2014; Wymer, Gross, & Helmig, 2016) was selected as the well-known charity brand. For the unknown charity brand, we created a fictitious charity, CharityShare (CS). We used the same video fundraising appeal for each ad. The ads were identical except for the sponsoring charity name and logo. Respondents were randomly split to view one of the two appeals and then completed the corresponding questionnaire. After viewing the informed consent statement, participants viewed a video that played to its end before allowing participants to proceed to the control question, “Who was the sponsor of the appeal?”. Only cases with the correct answer on the control question were considered for further analysis. The two ads were operationalized as a dichotomous dummy variable (code 1 for WWF and code 0 for CS). To check that the two-subgroups only differed with respect to the charity ad they viewed, socio-demographic characteristics were compared. No significant differences were found.

Sample and questionnaire

A questionnaire was created using the Qualtrics online survey tool. An informed consent statement was included, discussing the study’s purpose, and assuring the participants’ anonymity. Invitations to participate were sent via email and social networks, creating a convenience sample using a snowball sampling approach, which can be defended since cognitive processes being investigated are equally valid for each person (Leiner, 2017) and since snowball sampling has been used in other nonprofit and fundraising related studies (Cao, 2016; Asante et al., 2021). A starting point in snowball sampling was the authors’ peer network, as referrals (Fricker, 2016), known to be supporters of various nonprofit activities. In total, 350 participants enrolled; 60 either did not consent or did not proceed after watching the video. Furthermore, 19 cases with missing answers on more than 20% of questions were excluded, and five more were excluded as error outliers. The final size contained data from 266 respondents (N=266). Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 75, with mean age of 40.2 years, with 71.4 % being female. Respondents’ education levels were 15 % with high school diplomas, 10% with undergraduate degrees and 75% with master or postgraduate degrees. Approximately 81% of respondents resided in Southeast Europe. With respect to political orientation, respondents’ mean score was approximately neutral (mean value 3.81 on a scale from 1 to 7), not identifying as politically left or right.

Table 1. Measurement scales descriptives

code	Constructs and items	Mean	SD	Loading	Weights	t values	Cronbach Alpha
	Brand familiarity (BF)						0.882
bf1	I am knowledgeable about WWF (or) CS activities.	3.5	1.987	0.895	0.328	15,683	
bf2	I can describe WWF (or) CS to others.	3.85	1.894	0.890	0.390	17,576	
bf3	I have a good understanding of what WWF (or) CS has done in the past.	3.03	1.801	0.911	0.394	21,170	
	Brand remarkability (BR)						0.926
br1	No organization is better than WWF (or) CS at doing what it does.	3.95	1.381	0.913	0.323	28,083	
br2	WWF (or) CS really stands apart as being exceptional.	4.19	1.505	0.939	0.372	31,428	
br3	WWF (or) CS stands out in comparison to others.	4.36	1.506	0.948	0.376	35,068	
	Brand attitude (BA)						0.907
ba1	I have positive thoughts when I think of WWF (or) CS.	5.38	1.166	0.907	0.362	30,599	
ba2	I like WWF (or) CS.	5.32	1.136	0.924	0.361	30,098	
ba3	I have a positive impression about WWF (or) CS.	5.44	1.165	0.923	0.366	32,766	
	Value congruence (VC)						0.844
vc1	WWF (or) CS and I have similar values.	5.32	1.064	0.814	0.392	11,095	
vc2	The purpose for which funds are being raised represents values that are important to me.	5.65	1.039	0.896	0.337	11,930	
vc3	Supporting this campaign is consistent with my values.	5.63	1.042	0.907	0.418	14,974	
	Perceived donor risk (PDR)						0.844
pdr1	I believe WWF (or) CS will misuse the funds it raises.	3.14	1.507	0.849	0.323	9,873	
pdr2	I believe WWF (or) CS will not effectively use the funds it raises.	3.48	1.493	0.876	0.362	11,169	
pdr3	I am hesitated to share this campaign with friends because it could be a scam.	3.44	1.776	0.890	0.459	12,987	
	Evoked sympathy (SYM)						0.913
sym1	I feel bad for the tiger in the fundraising appeal.	6.03	1.007	0.897	0.334	8,595	
sym2	I feel pity for the tiger in the fundraising appeal.	6.09	0.969	0.929	0.338	9,665	
sym3	I feel sorrow for the tiger in the fundraising appeal.	6.08	0.964	0.942	0.410	12,568	
	Intention to donate (Donate)						
donate	If this were a real campaign, I would contribute a donation.	4.66	1.435				
	Intention for positive eWOM (WOM)						
Share	If this were a real campaign, I would make a favorable comments about this campaign on my social networks.	4.39	1.527				
	Intention to share on social media (Share)						
WOM	If this were a real campaign, I would share this campaign on my social media pages.	4.33	1.642				

Measures

Scales developed by Wymer et al., (2016) were used to measure brand familiarity (BF), brand remarkability (BR), and brand attitudes (BA). The value congruence (VC) scale was adapted from Peng et al. (2015) based on O’Reilly & Chatman (1986). The evoked sympathy (SYM) scale

was created based on Vossen et al. (2015). The perceived donor risk (PDR) scale was adapted from Hou et al. (2017) and Lee (2009). Scale items were measured using 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree).

Analysis

We employed variance-based partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) as a preferred method for exploratory research for theory development (Hair et al., 2019). PLS-SEM is robust for small-size samples, models with single and multi-item constructs (Chin, 2010), and for non-normally distributed data (Hair et al., 2019). PLS-SEM is a frequently used method in research dealing with donors’ behavior and attitudes that include complex structural models (Bin-Nashwan et al., 2022; da Silva et al., 2020; Wymer et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2019). SmartPLS 4.0 software was used for analysis (Ringle, Wende & Becker, 2024).

Minimal sample size was calculated with the inverse square root method (Kock & Hadaya, 2018) on a level of a minimal expected path of 0.2, indicating sample size adequacy (266 cases obtained compared to 155 needed). The dataset was checked for missing values, and eight missing values were replaced with a mean value of the represented item. Since histograms indicated no highly asymmetric parameter distribution, the nonparametric percentile bootstrapping method was used with 266 cases and 10,000 sub-samples (Becker et al., 2023).

To avoid the threat of common method bias, a procedure proposed by Podsakoff et al. (2003) was applied with temporal, proximal, and psychological separation of independent and dependent variables in the questionnaire, followed with Harman’s single-factor test (Kock, 2015). Results of unrotated principal component analysis revealed the first factor accounted for 41.52 % of the variance, below the threshold of 50% (Kock, 2020). Hence, common method bias was not a concern. Variance inflation factor (VIF) values of the outer and inner model were analyzed, with all values below the cut-off value of 3.3. for the inner model and all values for the outer model below the 5.0. Hence, collinearity issues were not a concern. In the next phase, the measurement model was estimated following the steps proposed by Chin (2010) and Hair et al. (2019).

Measurement model

The PLS analysis of the measurement model included validity and reliability checks, revealing a good fit of the data with the model. All factor loadings and Cronbach alphas were above the threshold of .70 (Hair et al., 2019). Composite reliability scores range from .905 to .953, which are above the .7 cutoff (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2. Discriminate validity

	BA	BF	BR	PDR	SYM	VC
BA	0.918	<i>0.664</i>	<i>0.708</i>	<i>0.700</i>	<i>0.280</i>	<i>0.628</i>
BF	<i>0.597</i>	0.899	<i>0.656</i>	<i>0.551</i>	<i>0.139</i>	<i>0.303</i>
BR	<i>0.651</i>	<i>0.597</i>	0.933	<i>0.579</i>	<i>0.142</i>	<i>0.303</i>
PDR	<i>-0.619</i>	<i>-0.486</i>	<i>-0.517</i>	0.872	<i>0.170</i>	<i>0.390</i>
SYM	<i>0.256</i>	<i>0.124</i>	<i>0.129</i>	<i>-0.145</i>	0.923	<i>0.505</i>
VC	<i>0.553</i>	<i>0.267</i>	<i>0.314</i>	<i>-0.328</i>	<i>0.444</i>	0.873

Note: Square root of average variance extracted (AVE), in bold and grey, are diagonal elements; above the diagonal, in italics, are HTMT values and below the diagonal is the latent variable correlation matrix.

With respect to the measurement model’s convergent and discriminant validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) are above the 0.50 cutoff, supporting convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity was checked with the Fornell-Larcker criterion, finding each construct’s square root of AVE higher than the correlation with other constructs and the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlation below .90 (Chin, 2010), as presented in Table 2.

Structural model

Assessment of the structural model was conducted following the procedure recommended by Hair et al. (2019) and Sarstedt et al. (2022): examining the coefficients of determination (R^2), redundancy measures (Q^2), and significance and relevance of the path coefficients. Out-of-sample predictive power was evaluated using the PLSpredict procedure (Shmueli et al., 2019).

The R^2 values for brand attitudes and outcomes ranged from .322 to .503, indicating model explanatory power is moderate. Model predictive relevance was assessed focusing on audience support intentions as three single-item variables. Q^2 values were higher than 0 for all latent constructs, confirming the predictive relevance of the model. In the final step, predictive power of the model was assessed by comparing PLS-SEM RMSE values with the naïve (linear regression model) benchmark (LM RMSE) for key endogenous constructs. Results showed lower or equal values of PLS-RMSE for two (Donation and WOM) out of three dependent constructs compared to the naïve LM benchmark, therefore, the majority.

Robustness check

To validate our results’ robustness (Hair et al., 2019; Guenther et al., 2023; Sarstedt et al., 2020), additional tests were conducted on the structural model (Hair et al., 2019), including tests for nonlinearity, endogeneity, and heterogeneity (Sarstedt et al., 2020).

All quadratic effects of paths were insignificant ((QE) $BF \rightarrow BA$ (.129); (QE) $BA \rightarrow$ Donate (.881), WOM (.087), Share (.830)), offering proof for the linear effect’s robustness (Sarstedt et al., 2020). Endogeneity was checked with the Gaussian copula approach. P-values of all 18 regression models were nonsignificant, indicating no endogeneity issues. Unobserved heterogeneity was assessed following the procedure applied by Sarstedt et al. (2020). Results were analyzed based on several indicators and the suggested number of segments. Akaike’s information criterion (AIC) and AIC with factor 3 (AIC_3) pointed to a 3-segment solution. Consistent AIC ($CAIC$) pointed to a 2-segment solution, and finally, minimum description length with factor 5 (MDL_5) pointed to a 1-segment solution. Results are ambiguous, varying from 1 to 3 segments, indicating that unobserved heterogeneity is not at a critical level (Sarstedt et al., 2020).

The proposed structural model with significant standardized path coefficients and R^2 values is presented in Figure 2 and hypothesis testing results are presented in Table 3.

Figure 2. Structural model, with significant path estimates



Table 3. Structural model analysis and hypotheses testing

Hypotheses	Relationship	Path coefficient/ β	Mean	SE	t value	p value	BCCI 2.5%-97.5% (two-tailed test)	f ² values	Decision
Direct effects									
H1	CB -> BF	1.073	1.076	0.096	11.199	0.000	0.869 1.245	0.404	Supported
H2 a	BF -> Donate	0.009	0.009	0.064	0.146	0.887	-0.119 0.133	0.000	Not supported
H2 b	BF -> Share	0.001	0.001	0.058	0.014	0.989	-0.113 0.115	0.000	Not supported
H2 c	BF -> WOM	0.012	0.010	0.066	0.169	0.866	-0.122 0.134	0.000	Not supported
H3 a	BA -> Donate	0.260	0.253	0.084	3.102	0.002	0.088 0.420	0.057	Supported
H3 b	BA -> Share	0.343	0.339	0.082	4.186	0.000	0.188 0.509	0.094	Supported
H3 c	BA -> WOM	0.314	0.311	0.087	3.623	0.000	0.146 0.486	0.067	Supported
H5	BR -> BA	0.443	0.4446	0.063	6.854	0.000	0.306 0.563	0.265	Supported
Mediation effects									
H4 a	BF -> BA -> Donate	0.083	0.080	0.030	2.763	0.006	0.033 0.155		Supported
H4 b	BF -> BA -> Share	0.110	0.108	0.033	3.356	0.001	0.058 0.190		Supported
H4 c	BF -> BA -> WOM	0.101	0.100	0.034	2.958	0.003	0.046 0.184		Supported
Moderation effects									
H6	BR x BF -> BA	0.111	0.112	0.049	2.277	0.023	0.009 0.202	0.024	Supported
H7 a	SYM x BA -> Donate	-0.013	-0.015	0.074	0.179	0.858	-0.159 0.130	0.000	Not supported
H7 b	SYM x BA -> Share	0.012	0.013	0.063	0.195	0.845	-0.115 0.132	0.000	Not supported
H7 c	SYM x BA -> WOM	0.043	0.045	0.060	0.712	0.477	-0.074 0.162	0.002	Not supported
H8 a	PDR x BA -> Donate	0.119	0.114	0.067	1.787	0.074	-0.022 0.240	0.016	Not supported
H8 b	PDR x BA -> Share	0.166	0.164	0.056	2.952	0.003	0.053 0.274	0.031	Not supported
H8 c	PDR x BA -> WOM	0.045	0.041	0.058	0.772	0.440	-0.070 0.156	0.002	Not supported
H9 a	VC x BA -> Donate	0.091	0.086	0.085	1.073	0.283	-0.075 0.258	0.008	Not supported
H9 b	VC x BA -> Share	0.037	0.034	0.067	0.548	0.584	-0.094 0.165	0.001	Not supported
H9 c	VC x BA -> WOM	0.053	0.049	0.062	0.868	0.386	-0.069 0.170	0.003	Not supported

As predicted in H1, the established brand (WWF) exerted a stronger influence than the fictitious brand (CS) on brand familiarity, ($\beta=1.073$, $t=11.199$, $p=.000$), supporting H1. Since we intended to explore direct and indirect effects of brand familiarity (BF) on audience support intentions, both relationships were included in the model, not examining the path significance of direct relationship a priori (Nitzl et al., 2016). Brand familiarity significantly and positively influences brand attitudes ($\beta=.318$, $t=5.179$, $p=.000$), and brand attitudes significantly and positively influences audience support intentions: Donate ($\beta=.260$, $t=3.101$, $p=.002$), Share ($\beta=.343$, $t=4.198$, $p=.000$) and WOM ($\beta=.315$, $t=3.640$, $p=.000$), confirming H3. In comparison, brand familiarity's direct effect on audience support intentions is not significant: Donate ($\beta=.009$, $t=.146$, $p=.887$), Share ($\beta=.001$, $t=.014$, $p=.989$) and WOM ($\beta=.012$, $t=.169$, $p=.866$), therefore H2 was not supported. All specific indirect effects are significant, with path coefficient values ranging from .083 to .110 (see Table 3). Accordingly, results indicate that the influence of brand familiarity on our audience support intentions is fully mediated through brand attitudes, supporting H4. The direct proposed relationship between brand remarkability and brand attitudes was also significant ($\beta=.443$, $t=6.854$, $p=.000$), supporting H5.

We predicted four moderation relationships. Evoked sympathy (SYMP), value congruence (VC), and perceived donor risk (PDR) were hypothesized to moderate the influence of brand attitudes (BA) on audience support intentions (Donate, Share, WOM). Brand remarkability (BR) was hypothesized to moderate the influence of brand familiarity on brand attitudes. We find that two hypothesized moderation effects were significant (BR x BF \rightarrow BA; $\beta=.111$, $P=.023$ and PDR x BA \rightarrow Share; $\beta=.166$, $P=.003$). Hence, brand remarkability has a positive moderation effect on BF \rightarrow BA, supporting H6. Surprisingly, perceived donor risk had a significant moderation effect on BA \rightarrow Share, but in a positive direction rather than a negative direction, as predicted, and H8 is not supported.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This research contributes to the literature by furthering our knowledge of the influence of certain brand constructs on audience support intentions. Our findings show that brand familiarity influences our outcome variables through its influence on brand attitudes. Brand familiarity's effects on audience support intentions are fully mediated through brand attitudes. Our findings add to prior literature reporting on the beneficial audience effects of brand familiarity (do Paço, Rodrigues, & Rodrigues, 2014; Ha, Pham, & Lee, 2022; Rim, Yang, & Lee, 2016). These findings, like those of Wymer and Yacout (2024), suggest that familiarizing audiences with a charity improves brand attitudes and should enhance fundraising appeals. This is somewhat true, but it is a more complex relationship. Our findings contribute to prior research by finding that brand remarkability moderates the influence of brand familiarity on brand attitudes. Our findings suggest that as a charity becomes better known to an audience, and as the charity is perceived to be exceptional and extraordinary, our audience's attitudes toward the charity become more favorable. As brand attitudes improve, the fundraising appeal becomes more effective. Conversely, as audience members become more familiar with a charity, they may perceive the charity to be average or below average, in comparison with other, similar charities (low brand remarkability). This would reduce the magnitude of brand attitudes and its influence on audience outcomes.

As one purpose of this research was to replicate the findings of Wymer and Yacout (2024), we will elaborate a comparison of our study with theirs. Brand attitudes had a significant influence on audience outcomes in both studies. In both studies, brand familiarity's influence on audience outcomes was mediated through brand attitudes. Brand remarkability's influence on audience outcomes was mediated by brand attitudes in both studies. A contribution of our study was that we found that brand remarkability moderated brand familiarity's influence on brand attitudes, a relationship which was not examined in Wymer and Yacout (2024).

Much of charity advertising is grounded on the belief that evoking an emotional response increases an audience's responsiveness to the ad (Wymer & Gross, 2023). The evoked emotion is often sympathy for the featured victims in the charity ad/appeal. We, therefore, included

evoked sympathy as a potential moderator in our conceptual model. We found that evoked audience sympathy was not a significant moderator of brand attitudes' influence on audience support intentions. Perhaps a greater emphasis should be placed on strengthening the charity's reputation (brand remarkability) and becoming better known to the priority audience (brand familiarity) as a means of improving the effectiveness of charity efforts to attract and retain support. It may be that the influence of brand attitudes is substantially greater than evoked sympathy. Future research could enhance our understanding of the relationship between charity brand attitudes and audience evoked emotions for charity appeal effectiveness.

Prior research has shown that civic participation and charity support are value expressive behaviors (Clary et al., 1998; Kropp, Holden, & Lavack, 1999). Hence, we included value congruence as a moderator in our conceptual model. Contrary to our prediction, value congruence was not found to be a significant moderator. In interpreting this result, we posit that value congruence's effects, if any, were markedly less than brand attitudes or that audience members' value congruence are accounted for in their perceived brand attitudes. Future research is needed to clarify our understanding on this issue.

We also examined the influence of perceived donor risk in our conceptual model. We found that perceived donor risk had an anomalous positive moderating effect on brand attitudes influence on social media sharing intentions rather than the negative effect we predicted. In general, perceived donor risk did not have a meaningful influence within our conceptual model. In considering explanations for this finding, it may be that since respondents knew they were not actually going to donate money, they did not really incorporate risk into their response considerations. It may also be that the positive charity ads and WWF's good reputation were perceived favorably and did not evoke any meaningful risk threat among audience members. Future research could clarify the relationship between brand attitudes and perceived donor risk.

Managerial implications

Our findings support the potential efficacy of nonprofit leaders adopting a brand orientation (García-Madariaga et al., 2024). Nonprofit managers may benefit by developing and implementing a brand strategy (Ha et al., 2022). Becoming a strong brand facilitates supporter cultivation, retention, and commitment. Brand strength has a leveraging effect on an organization's marketing activities (Wymer, 2015). Our findings show that brand familiarity and brand remarkability both influence brand attitudes, which enhances a charity's appeal for support.

Management practices for strengthening brands begin with increasing brand remarkability. If audience members are familiar with an organization, would they describe it in superlative terms? To increase brand remarkability, nonprofit managers should engage in a program of continuous improvement in ways that enhance stakeholders' perceptions of the organization's exceptionalism and superiority (Wymer & Yacout, 2024).

Our findings show that brand remarkability interacts with brand familiarity's influence on brand attitudes. Brand attitudes, in turn, influence audience support intentions. Ideally, nonprofit managers should aim for high levels of both brand remarkability and brand familiarity as strategic marketing objectives. We recommend that managers emphasize increasing brand remarkability first and then focus on increasing brand familiarity. It is desirable to familiarize audiences with an organization through exposure to communications emphasizing the excellence of the organization. It is also important for managers to ensure stakeholders have favorable experiences (brand experience). Brand experiences are assimilated with other brand-related information to form brand familiarity and brand remarkability perceptions.

Limitations and future research

We hope our findings will inspire future research. Other brand constructs can be examined for their respective influences, such as brand authenticity, brand experience, brand preference, brand salience, brand identification, or brand loyalty. Brand remarkability serves such an important role in establishing a strong brand that future research discovering brand remarkability's antecedents would be edifying. The relationship between an organization's managerial orientation, such as a marketing orientation, and its emphasis on engaging and influencing external audiences would also contribute to our knowledge of nonprofit marketing.

Social media is now dominating the communication space and more needs to be known about how to be effective (attain desired audience outcomes) using it. Extant research has made clear the importance of getting one's message/appeal supported within social networks by motivating audience members to (1) make favorable comments about a charity's posting, and (2) share a charity's message/appeal within their own social networks. The growing importance of social media motivated us to include positive WOM intentions and social media sharing intentions as outcome variables in our conceptual model. We encourage other researchers to include relevant social media constructs in their own conceptual models to further enhance our understanding on social media marketing for nonprofit organizations.

The symbiotic roles of trust and risk need further exploration to understand their conceptualizations and relationships more fully. Does risk act as an intention inhibitor and trust act as a motivator? Are they mutually exclusive constructs or do they exist on different poles within the domain of a higher order construct? Is trust a hygiene factor, for which a positive value is a necessary but insufficient determinant of donation intentions? In this study, our moderation predications for perceived donor trust were not supported. We posit that perceptions of trust may be embedded in brand attitudes and, hence, offset perceived donor trust, but this is speculation, and future research is needed to better understand this relationship.

With respect to charity advertising, more needs to be understood about the audience influences of focal constructs like brand familiarity and evoked sympathy. The mechanisms of how the constructs exert their audience effects are not well understood. Some constructs may stimulate attention to further processing of the appeal. Other constructs may motivate compliance with a charity appeal. Mere exposure effects are not often examined because of the added complexity in research designs. Repeated exposure effects of a charity ad may accentuate construct influences, bringing greater clarity in understanding construct relationships.

Like all research, ours has limitations and our results should be interpreted accordingly. We collected data using a sample of 266 respondents that were not randomly selected. Hence, our convenience sample may not be representative of the general population. Given the modest sample size, our statistical power was also modest, meaning that small but significant relationships existing in the data may not have been detected. The external validity and, hence, the generalizability of our findings will be made clearer over time with future research replicating and extending our results using data from diverse samples.

An important limitation of this study relates to the experimental manipulation with the use of a real brand (WWF) versus a fictitious brand (CharityShare), which could affect not only familiarity but also other constructs of the proposed model. These unintended effects could partially affect the comparability of the groups and should be taken into account when interpreting the results. In future studies, several real and fictitious brands should be included in order to better isolate the influence of brand familiarity and at the same time minimize the influence of other constructs.

Finally, in this study, our proposed moderators were not found to have significant relationships as predicted. One possible explanation for these nonsignificant findings is that there are no true moderation relationships as predicted. Another possible explanation is that there are true moderation effects, but that they are too weak to be detected in our analysis (insufficient statistical power, small true effect sizes, practical effects too small relative to noise). To detect

very small true effect sizes would require very large samples, and such weak relationships would have limited practical value. Yet another possible explanation for nonsignificant moderation effects might be a manifestation of measurement problems. We consider this an unlikely possibility given that our measurement model evaluation showed favorable measurement properties. Furthermore, the face validity of our measurement scales indicates their appropriateness in covering their respective constructs' conceptual domains.

Disclosure Statement

The author(s) declare that there are no conflicts of interest that relate to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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