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How donor's regulatory focus changes the effectiveness of a sadness-evoking charity appeal☆

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ABSTRACT

Past research offers conflicting findings on whether sadness-evoking charity appeals help solicit a donation. To reconcile these findings, we introduce prospective donors' regulatory focus as a moderator for understanding when and why sadness appeals motivate or demotivate giving. Specifically, we propose that the sense of helplessness or loss of control associated with sadness appeals increases donors' sensitivity to advertiser's manipulative persuasion tactics, as those tactics can threaten donors' control over their donation decision. As a result, sadness appeals are more likely to activate persuasion knowledge among prevention- (vs. promotion-) oriented donors who tend to be vigilant against manipulative persuasion attempts. Across six main studies and two supplementary studies, we find that a prevention (vs. promotion) focus discourages charitable giving when it is solicited using a sadness appeal, whereas regulatory focus does not affect the giving when other emotion appeals (e.g., happiness appeal or guilt appeal) are used. We find that a prevention (vs. promotion) focus demotivates donation solicited by a sadness appeal because it activates persuasion knowledge that evaluates solicitor's motive behind the sadness appeal, resulting in increased skepticism, dampened feelings of sympathy, and consequently, reduced charitable giving. However, when persuasion knowledge is deactivated (e.g., when donors' cognitive capacity is constrained or the soliciting charity has a reliable reputation), regulatory focus no longer affects donor skepticism, sympathy, and charitable giving, even when a sadness appeal is used to call for donation.

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Since individual donors account for around 70% of annual charitable contributions (Giving, 2019), much of the fund-raising efforts are directed towards winning the favor of individual donors (Diepen et al., 2009). To this end, charitable organizations have widely adopted emotion manipulation in their advertisements to appeal to individual donors (Randle et al., 2016; Seu & Orgad, 2014). In particular, inducing sadness through images or narratives of suffering victims has been a popular industry trend (Seu & Orgad, 2014). Individual donors report frequent exposures to adverts incorporating "sad-eyed children, slowed-down pop ballads and somber voice-overs" (Nezhati, 2014).

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Past research provides insight into why evoking sadness might be effective in soliciting donations. For instance, past studies show that sadness motivates individuals to engage in behaviors that repair their emotional distress (Garg & Lerner, 2013; Raghunathan & Pham, 1999), and charitable giving serves as an effective means to repair the distressing mood state (Cialdini & Kenrick, 1976; Schaller & Cialdini, 1990). Accordingly, individuals feeling sad after viewing sadness-evoking ads would be motivated to make a donation to repair their sadness. Small and Verrochi (2009) more specifically tested the effect of sadness appeals in the context of charitable giving. They find that viewing an image of a sad-faced victim (vs. a happy- or neutral- faced victim) encourages charitable giving, because the sadness on the victim's face is transferred to the viewers, and this emotional contagion enhances the feelings of sympathy towards the victim (Small & Verrochi, 2009). Similarly, viewing images or video clips on sufferings of helpless others (vs. images or video clips unrelated to suffering) promotes compassion and perspective-taking about the needy (Oveis et al., 2010; Piff et al., 2010). Because sympathy and related feelings, such as compassion, are powerful predictors of pro-social behaviors, sympathy enhanced through indirect exposure to sadness and suffering in these studies resulted in greater charitable giving (Batson et al., 1997; Eisenberg et al., 1989; Loewenstein & Small, 2007; Small et al., 2007; Tangney et al., 2007).

In contrast, instead of eliciting sympathy, several other research findings attest that experiencing sadness after viewing images of needy victims or reading their stories is not more effective than experiencing neutral or positive emotions, and can even provoke psychological reactance, such as skepticism and avoidance, among potential donors (Cao & Jia, 2017; Dahlinger & Wortmann, 2016; Kang et al., 2018; Liang et al., 2016; Pancer, 1988; Pancer et al., 1979, 1979; Seu & Orgad, 2014). For instance, a qualitative study utilizing focus groups and one-on-one in-depth interviews find that sadness-inducing charity appeals instigate donor skepticism and the key source of it is the “marketing overkill” utilizing “excessively traumatic” messages that often leave the viewers feeling “manipulated” and “wretched for not doing more to help” (Nezhati, 2014; Seu & Orgad, 2014; Sher, 2011). Likewise, experiments conducted by Pancer and his colleagues (Pancer, 1988; Pancer, Deforest, et al., 1979; Pancer, McMullen, et al., 1979) show that prospective donors avoid charitable calls and decrease their giving when images of suffering victims or actual victims are present at charity booths, compared to when they are absent. Although potential donors reported perceiving sadness from the faces of the victims, the perceived sadness caused reactance, not sympathy (Pancer, 1988). Since psychological reactance occurs as a response to a perceived threat to personal freedom or one's sense of control (Brehm & Brehm, 1981), Deforest, et al. (1979) argues that the sadness-evoking charity appeals placed a “strong normative pressure” that threatened donors' freedom of choice (i.e., their choice to give or not) and, as a result, triggered reactance (p. 1407).

The present research aims to reconcile these past inconsistent findings on whether sadness-evoking charity appeals motivate or demotivate giving. To this end, we introduce donors' regulatory orientation as a moderator of the effectiveness of sad charity appeals. In the following section, we explain why donors' regulatory orientation would moderate the effectiveness of a sad charity appeal by reviewing relevant past research.

1. Conceptual framework and hypotheses

1.1. The effect of sadness appeals on activating persuasion knowledge

Extant theories on emotion document that sadness arises from a perception that a misfortune has been caused by a circumstance that is beyond one's control (Keltner et al., 1993; Lazarus, 1991; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Hence, a sense of helplessness or low personal control is the key cognitive appraisal associated with sadness (Garg & Lerner, 2013). Past research suggests that a cognitive appraisal of a situation triggers an emotion, but the appraisal tends to “persist beyond the [emotion] eliciting situation, becoming an implicit lens for interpreting subsequent situations” (Lerner et al., 2004, p. 337; Han et al., 2007; Lerner & Keltner, 2000; Tiedens & Linton, 2001). That is, sadness experienced due to a misfortune which was beyond one's control increases an individual's tendency to appraise that one has low control over subsequent decisions or events (Keltner et al., 1993). Accordingly, the sense of low personal control associated with sadness would increase people's sensitivity to factors that pose a threat to their personal control. Based on these findings, we propose that experiencing sadness after viewing a sad charity appeal would increase donors' sensitivity to advertiser's manipulative persuasion tactics because those tactics can engender donors' control over their donation decision (i.e., their freedom to donate or not). Indeed, past studies show that manipulative persuasion tactics can threaten consumers' sense of control and, as a result, trigger skepticism and avoidance of ads utilizing such tactics (Baek & Morimoto, 2012). Consequently, a sadness appeal serves as a cue that motivates donors to maintain their control over the donation decision.

To maintain the control over inadequate persuasion attempts, past research suggests that consumers activate persuasion knowledge that evaluates advertisers' motivations and persuasion tactics (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Hence, if a sadness appeal increases a donor's sensitivity to the manipulative intent behind the appeal, it is likely to activate the donor's persuasion knowledge to evaluate the adequacy of the appeal. However, we do not expect all donors to activate persuasion knowledge and become vigilant against the sadness appeal, as indicated by the past inconsistent findings on the effectiveness of sad charity appeals. Kirmani and Zhu (2007) find that the extent to which consumers activate persuasion knowledge and become vigilant against manipulative tactics depends on individuals' regulatory orientation. Based on this finding, we expect that donors' regulatory orientation would determine whether a sadness appeal activates persuasion knowledge and evaluate the sadness appeal as inadequate. In other words, donors' regulatory focus will affect whether a sad charity appeal effectively raises donation

or not and serve as a moderator that reconciles the past conflicting findings. Next, we introduce regulatory focus and discuss past research that informed our prediction.

1.2. The role of regulatory focus on activating persuasion knowledge against sadness appeals

Regulatory focus theory suggests that individuals perceive and attain their goals differently depending on their regulatory focus (Higgins, 1997, 2000). Prevention-focused individuals perceive their goals as duties and obligations, and pursue their goals by avoiding losses and mismatches to their desired end states. On the other hand, promotion-focused individuals see their goals as hopes and aspirations, and attain them by approaching matches to their desired goal states. Consequently, promotion-focused individuals tend to pursue their goals with eagerness, whereas prevention-focused individuals pursue their goals with vigilance. Due to these differences in goal perceptions and goal attainment strategies, Kirmani and Zhu (2007) show that regulatory focus affects the extent to which consumers are sensitive to advertiser's manipulative intent and, therefore, the ways in which they use their persuasion knowledge. Specifically, prevention-focused (vs. promotion-focused) individuals are more vigilant against advertisers' persuasion attempts as they wish to avoid being unnecessarily influenced by an ad. Consequently, when encountering an ad that contains cues that make the advertiser's manipulative intent moderately salient (e.g., ambiguous product benefit claims), prevention-focused individuals activate persuasion knowledge, become more skeptical of the ad claims, and evaluate the advertised brand more negatively compared to promotion-focused individuals. However, when the manipulative intent behind an ad claim is perceived to be highly salient [not salient], regulatory focus does not influence consumers' skepticism and brand evaluation because persuasion knowledge is activated [not at all activated] across both regulatory foci.

Like ambiguous ad claims, we propose that a sad charity appeal would function as a cue that activates persuasion knowledge particularly among prevention-focused donors. Because the sense of low personal control associated with sadness heightens donors' sensitivity to advertiser's manipulative tactics that can jeopardize donors' control over the donation decision, a sadness appeal serves as a cue that activates persuasion knowledge among prevention-oriented donors who tend to be vigilant against losses—in particular, the loss of control over the donation decision due to being influenced by manipulative persuasion tactics. Consequently, compared to promotion-oriented donors, prevention-oriented donors would be more likely to scrutinize the persuasion tactics adopted by sadness appeals and perceive the sadness appeal as inadequate (i.e., as a threat to their control over the donation decision). Therefore, under a prevention (vs. promotion) focus, prospective donors will be more likely to become skeptical of the ad and decrease donation. In contrast, when a charity appeal induces an emotion whose cognitive appraisals are not associated with a sense of loss of control (e.g., happiness), a prevention (vs. promotion) focus is less likely to activate persuasion knowledge, compared to when sadness is induced. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H1-1. Compared to a promotion focus, a prevention focus decreases charitable giving when a donation is solicited using a sadness appeal. In contrast, when a donation is solicited using a happiness appeal, regulatory focus is less likely to influence charitable giving, compared to when using a sadness appeal.

Similar to sadness, guilt is a negative emotion that is commonly adopted by charity appeals as it tends to encourage pro-social behaviors (Baumeister et al., 1994; Huhmann & Brotherton, 1997). Past studies find that when the manipulative intent behind guilt appeals are salient, they activate persuasion knowledge and, as a result, donors evaluate the appeal to be manipulative and decrease their giving (Cotte et al., 2005; Hibbert et al., 2007). However, we expect guilt appeals, compared to sadness appeals, are less likely to activate persuasion knowledge differentially among prevention (vs. promotion) oriented donors; that is, the regulatory focus is less likely to moderate the effect of guilt (vs. sadness) appeals on charitable giving. Despite being associated with an appraisal of a negative outcome (similar to sadness), the control over the outcome is still with the self in the case of guilt (i.e., an appraisal of high personal control; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Weiner et al., 1982). Accordingly, guilt appeals, compared to sadness appeals, are less likely to increase sensitivity to sources that pose threat to donors' control (i.e., manipulative persuasion tactics) and serve as a cue that activates persuasion knowledge particularly among prevention (vs. promotion) oriented donors who tend to be vigilant against such potential threats. Therefore, we expect that activating persuasion knowledge distinctively for donors with prevention (vs. promotion) orientation and the resultant decrease in donation under a prevention (vs. promotion) focus would be relatively a unique response to a sadness appeal that is associated with a sense of low personal control.

H1-2. Compared to a promotion focus, a prevention focus decreases charitable giving when a donation is solicited using a sadness appeal. In contrast, when a donation is solicited using a guilt appeal, regulatory focus is less likely to influence charitable giving, compared to when using a sadness appeal.

We further propose that a prevention (vs. promotion) focus discourages prospective donors from giving because persuasion knowledge instigates skepticism, which in turn impairs the donors from feeling sympathetic towards potential beneficiaries. One representative outcome of activated persuasion knowledge is increased skepticism (Kirmani & Zhu, 2007). In addition, past research suggests that when people's sense of control is threatened, they psychologically react against the source of the threat (e.g., an ad) by becoming skeptical of the source (Baek & Morimoto, 2012; Brehm & Brehm, 1981). Hence, a sad charity appeal is more likely to instigate skepticism under a prevention (vs. promotion) focus as it is more likely to activate donors' persuasion knowledge and is vigilant against sources that may impair their personal control. Furthermore, prior research shows that sadness motivates charitable giving through enhanced feelings of sympathy towards victims (Small & Verrochi, 2009). However, sympathy may be disrupted when the donors no longer evaluate the sadness-evoking ad as trustworthy. Past empirical findings suggest that skepticism or lack of trust

could hinder people from feeling sympathy for others. For instance, past studies show that lonely individuals (vs. those who are not lonely) tend to believe relationships are superficial and thus avoid trust-requiring behaviors such as disclosing their past to others (Berg & Peplau, 1982; Russell et al., 1978; Wheelless & Grotz, 1977). At the same time, lonely individuals are less likely to feel sympathetic towards others (Beadle et al., 2012; Davis, 1983; DeWall & Baumeister, 2006; Twenge et al., 2007). Together, these findings imply that lonely people's lack of trust towards others might have prevented them from feeling sympathetic towards others. Building on these findings, we propose that increased skepticism or undermined trust towards a sadness appeal would dampen sympathy towards victims and consequently demotivate giving (Fig. 1).

H2. When a sadness appeal is used to solicit a donation, an increase in skepticism and a decrease in sympathy sequentially mediate the negative effect of prevention (vs. promotion) focus on charitable giving. In contrast, when a happiness appeal is used, skepticism and sympathy do not mediate the effect of regulatory focus on charitable giving.

1.3. Deactivating persuasion knowledge against sadness appeals

We have proposed that donors' persuasion knowledge is what evaluates the manipulative intent behind a sadness-evoking charity appeal and, as a result, raises skepticism and undermines feelings of sympathy and charitable giving under a prevention (vs. promotion) focus. If this is the case, deactivating the persuasion knowledge should attenuate the effect of donors' regulatory focus on skepticism towards a sadness appeal, and thus, on the feelings of sympathy and overall giving. According to prior research, low cognitive capacity impairs activation of persuasion knowledge (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000; Millar & Millar, 1997). That is, when donors' cognitive capacity is constrained, their persuasion knowledge would be deactivated regardless of their regulatory orientation. Consequently, donors' regulatory focus would not affect skepticism, sympathy, and overall giving, even when a sadness appeal is used to call for the donation.

H3. Compared to a promotion focus, a prevention focus decreases charitable giving solicited with a sadness appeal only when a donor's cognitive capacity is not constrained. In contrast, when a donor's cognitive capacity is constrained, the donor's regulatory focus no longer affects his or her charitable giving even when a sadness appeal is used to solicit the donation.

In addition, we propose that the reputation as a reliable charity would serve as another boundary condition that would mitigate persuasion knowledge. Decades of research has demonstrated that when the source of a message is credible, then the message gains greater persuasive power (see Pornpitakpan, 2004, for a review). For instance, reputation as a credible corporate decreases consumers' skepticism towards advertisements communicated by the corporate and increases perceived sincerity behind its corporate social responsibility activities (Bae & Cameron, 2006; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004; Strahilevitz, 2003; Yoon et al., 2006). Extending these findings to charity contexts, we propose that the credibility of a charitable organization would mitigate persuasion knowledge against a sadness-evoking appeal communicated by that charity. Consequently, the effect of regulatory focus on donor skepticism, sympathy, and charitable giving would be attenuated. Hence, we hypothesize:

H4. Compared to a promotion focus, a prevention focus decreases charitable giving solicited with a sadness appeal, only when a charity does not have a reputation as a reliable organization. In contrast, when a charity has a reputation as a reliable organization, a donor's regulatory focus no longer affects his or her charitable giving even when a sadness appeal is used to solicit the donation.

Note that we do not compare the difference between emotion appeals within each type of regulatory focus because we do not have prior expectation on whether a sadness appeal would be more effective than a happiness (or other emotion) appeal in general (i.e., the main effect of emotion appeal manipulation). Specifically, when a sadness appeal is more effective than a happiness appeal as suggested by Small and Verrochi (2009), a prevention focus can raise skepticism and decrease charitable giving raised by the sadness appeal to a level that is less than, equal to, or greater than the amount raised by the happiness appeal. In this case, it is impossible to predict the direction of the simple difference between the two emotion appeals within each type of regulatory focus. As discussed earlier, past studies report mixed findings on the effectiveness of sadness appeals over happiness appeals (e.g., Pancer, 1988; Pancer, Deforest, et al., 1979; Pancer, McMullen, et al., 1979; Piff et al., 2010; Small & Verrochi,

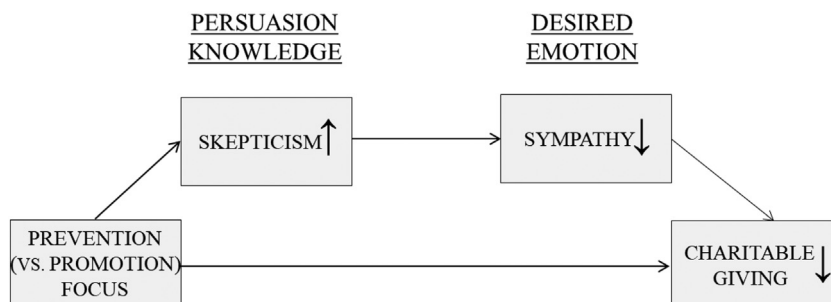


Fig. 1. The effect of regulatory focus on prospective donors' response towards a sadness appeal.

2009). Accordingly, we do not hypothesize the difference between emotion appeals within each regulatory focus type. Instead, we hypothesize the differences between regulatory focus—in the levels of skepticism, sympathy, and giving—when a sadness appeal is used, and that this differences would be greater for a sadness appeal, compared to when other emotion appeals, such as a happiness appeal or a guilt appeal, are used.

We next present six studies (and two supplementary studies reported in the web appendix) that test our predictions. Study 1 demonstrates the impact of participants' chronic regulatory focus on a real donation behavior. We find that a prevention focus decreases the donated amount compared to a promotion focus when a sadness appeal is used to solicit the donation, whereas regulatory focus does not affect the donated amount when a happiness appeal is used (H1-1). Two supplementary studies replicate these effects using different ads while regulatory focus is primed, instead of being measured, in one of the studies. Study 2 compares a sadness appeal with a guilt appeal (in addition to a happiness appeal) and find that a prevention (vs. promotion) focus decreases donation uniquely for the sadness appeal, and not for the other appeals (H1-1 & H1-2). Study 3 examines the causal chain of psychological mechanism underlying our effect. It demonstrates that a prevention (vs. promotion) focus activates persuasion knowledge against a sadness appeal that increases skepticism, which in turn disrupts the feelings of sympathy and demotivates charitable giving (H2). Studies 4 and 5 substantiate this mechanism by demonstrating the boundary conditions of the effect. Specifically, study 4 shows that constraining participants' cognitive capacity deactivates their persuasion knowledge, and as a result, participants' regulatory focus no longer affects their charitable giving even when the donation is solicited using a sadness appeal (H3). Study 5 further demonstrates that persuasion knowledge against a sad charity appeal can be attenuated when the charity has a reputation as a reliable organization. Consequently, when a charity is known to be reliable, participants' regulatory focus does not affect donor skepticism, feelings of sympathy, and charitable giving even when a sadness appeal is used to solicit the donation (H4). Finally, study 6 validates the practical utility of understanding regulatory focus as a moderator for the effect of sadness appeal on charitable giving. Specifically, a sadness appeal demotivates giving among participants from an Eastern culture who tend to be prevention-oriented, compared to participants from a Western culture who tend to be promotion-oriented (Lee et al., 2000). The results highlight the importance of segmenting potential donors based on observable donor characteristics that are highly correlated with regulatory focus, such as geographical or ethnic cultures, when deciding to utilize sadness appeals to solicit a donation.

2. Study 1: the effect of regulatory focus on real monetary donation

The objective of study 1 is to test whether regulatory focus affects the effectiveness of a sadness appeal in raising real monetary donation. We expected that when donation is solicited using a sadness appeal, prevention-oriented donors would donate less amount of money, compared to promotion-oriented donors. In contrast, this difference in the donated amount will be less likely to be observed when using a happiness (vs. sadness) appeal (H1-1).

2.1. Method

We first recruited 247 participants through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) for a marketing survey (on brand names) which was unrelated to our main study. We then asked if they would like to participate in an additional survey for about seven minutes and receive \$1 bonus payment. Two hundred and twenty-four participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 35.8$ years; 104 males, 118 females, and 2 preferred not to answer) agreed to participate in the additional survey and were randomly assigned to one of two emotion appeal conditions: sadness vs. happiness. All participants viewed an advertisement from World Help¹ that solicited donations for children in poverty (see web appendix for the actual ads used in the study). Participants in the sadness appeal condition saw an ad that contained an image of a crying child along with a message that described the sufferings of children in poverty whose situations seemed to be beyond their control (i.e., soaring food prices that pushed poor children to suffering and death). On the other hand, participants in the happiness appeal condition saw an image of a smiling child along with a message that highlighted the positive consequences of donors' help.²

After viewing the advertisement, participants indicated how much of the \$1 bonus payment they would like to donate to World Help. Next, participants responded to eleven questions that measured their chronic regulatory focus on a five-point scale (6 items for a promotion focus and 5 items for a prevention focus; Higgins et al., 2001). At the completion of the study, each participant's pledged amount was donated to World Help while the rest of the bonus was paid to the participants. Note that participants' demographic information was collected at the end of the filler study (i.e., brand name survey) completed before the main study.

2.2. Results

2.2.1. Regulatory focus

Following the technique suggested by Higgins et al. (2001), the prevention score ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.78$, $\alpha = 0.78$) was subtracted from the promotion score ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 0.70$, $\alpha = 0.76$). Participants with difference scores greater than zero

¹ We received permission from World Help to use their name and modified versions of their ads in our research.

² A pretest on a different group of forty-seven participants from the same population (25 males and 22 females, 32.7 years) confirmed that the sadness appeal ($M = 6.91$) elicited more sadness than the happiness appeal ($M = 4.17$; $F(1, 45) = 14.28$, $p < .001$), whereas the happiness appeal ($M = 4.25$) elicited more happiness than the sadness appeal ($M = 2.17$, $F(1, 45) = 10.96$, $p < .01$).

were identified as promotion-focused (107 participants); participants with difference scores less than or equal to zero were identified as prevention-focused (117 participants). The emotion appeal manipulation did not affect participants' chronic regulatory focus ($F(1,222) = 1.29, p > .25$).

2.2.2. Donation amount

An ANOVA with chronic regulatory focus and emotion appeal revealed a significant main effect of emotion appeal ($M_{\text{sad}} = \$0.33, M_{\text{happy}} = \$0.21; F(1,220) = 7.51, p = .007$). More important, a marginally significant interaction effect was found ($F(1, 220) = 2.77, p = .097$). The planned contrasts revealed that when participants viewed the sadness appeal, prevention-oriented individuals ($M = \$0.27$) donated significantly less amount than promotion-oriented individuals ($M = \$0.39, F(1, 220) = 4.55, p = .034$). However, regulatory focus did not affect the amount donated when participants viewed the happiness appeal ($M_{\text{prevention}} = \$0.22, M_{\text{promotion}} = \$0.20, F(1, 220) < 1; \text{Fig. 2}$).

2.2.3. Decision to donate or not

We conducted an additional analysis to understand whether the effect we observed on the donation amount was driven by the decreased proportion of participants who made a donation under a prevention (vs. promotion) focus, or by the smaller amount donated from prevention (vs. promotion) oriented donors (while the number of participants who donated did not differ across the two regulatory orientations). A binary logistic regression with emotion appeal and chronic regulatory focus as predictors revealed significant main effects of regulatory focus (Wald $X^2 = 5.90, df = 1, p = .015$) and of emotion appeal (Wald $X^2 = 4.96, df = 1, p = .026$). More important, these main effects were qualified by a significant interaction effect (Wald $X^2 = 5.28, df = 1, p = .022$). When participants saw the sadness appeal, the percentage of participants who decided to donate was significantly smaller under a prevention focus ($M = 53\%$) than under a promotion focus ($M = 81\%; \text{Wald } X^2 = 11.54, df = 1, p = .001$). In contrast, regulatory focus did not impact the proportion of participants who donated when they saw the happiness appeal ($M_{\text{prevention}} = 53\%, M_{\text{promotion}} = 54\%; \text{Wald } X^2 = 0.01, df = 1, p > .92$).³

2.3. Discussion and follow-up studies

Study 1 demonstrated that when a sadness appeal is used to solicit a donation, a prevention (vs. promotion) focus discourages participants from giving. In contrast, when a happiness appeal was used, regulatory focus did not affect charitable giving (H1-1).

We conducted two follow-up studies that conceptually replicated these effects. Supplementary study A ($n = 111$, undergraduate students; see web appendix for the full procedure and results) adopted a 2 (primed regulatory focus: promotion vs. prevention) \times 2 (emotion appeal: sadness vs. happiness) between-subjects design. First, regulatory focus was manipulated by priming either ideals or oughts (Higgins et al., 1994). Next, participants saw an ad from World Vision⁴ that utilized either a sadness appeal or a happiness appeal (see web appendix for the actual ads). Finally, they indicated their intention to donate to World Vision on a nine-point scale (1 = very unlikely; 9 = very likely). Consistent with H1-1, the sadness appeal discouraged the donation intention when the prevention (vs. promotion) focus was primed ($M_{\text{prevention}} = 4.08, M_{\text{promotion}} = 5.14, F(1, 107) = 4.74, p = .032$). In contrast, when the happiness appeal was used, the primed regulatory focus did not affect the donation intention ($M_{\text{prevention}} = 5.02, M_{\text{promotion}} = 4.26; F(1, 107) = 2.71, p > .10$; 2-way interaction: $F(1, 107) = 7.36, p = .008$).

Supplementary study B ($n = 119$, MTurk; see web appendix for the full procedure and results) replicated these effects on a different type of donation behavior. Specifically, after viewing either a sadness appeal or a happiness appeal (see web appendix for the actual ads), participants were asked to specify the amount they wished to pre-commit to the featured charity out of potential lottery winnings (\$10). They were informed that the pledged amount will be automatically subtracted from their lottery winnings and sent to the charity if they become the winner.⁵ Participants' chronic regulatory focus was measured as in study 1. The results once again confirmed that prevention-oriented participants pre-committed less amount of money for the charity than promotion-oriented participants when participants saw a sad charity appeal ($M_{\text{prevention}} = \$4.31, M_{\text{promotion}} = \$6.42; F(1, 115) = 6.65, p = .011$). In contrast, regulatory focus did not impact the amount pre-committed when participants saw a happiness appeal ($M_{\text{prevention}} = \$3.64, M_{\text{promotion}} = \$3.39, F < 1$; 2-way interaction: $F(1, 115) = 4.27, p = .041$).

3. Study 2: sadness appeal versus guilt appeal

Study 2 is designed to rule out the alternative explanation that our effects were driven by the valence of emotions—that is, a prevention focus discourages giving when any negative appeal is used, not just when a sadness appeal is used. To this end, we

³ We conducted supplementary analyses, excluding participants who donated \$0, to examine whether a prevention (vs. promotion) focus decreased the amount donated for a sadness appeal among those who donated some of their bonus payment (i.e., the amount donated *conditional-on-giving*). The results revealed a marginally significant main effect of emotion appeal ($M_{\text{sad}} = \$0.49, M_{\text{happy}} = \$0.40; F(1,132) = 3.30, p = .071$), but all the other effects were not significant (p 's > 0.61), indicating that the results we observed in Fig. 2 was driven by the decreased proportion of participants who wished to donate under a prevention (vs. promotion) focus when a sadness appeal was used to solicit a donation.

⁴ We received permission from World Vision to use their name and modified versions of their ads in our research.

⁵ At the completion of the study, the lottery winner was announced and the amount the winner pre-committed was donated to the featured charity while the rest of the winnings was paid to the winner.

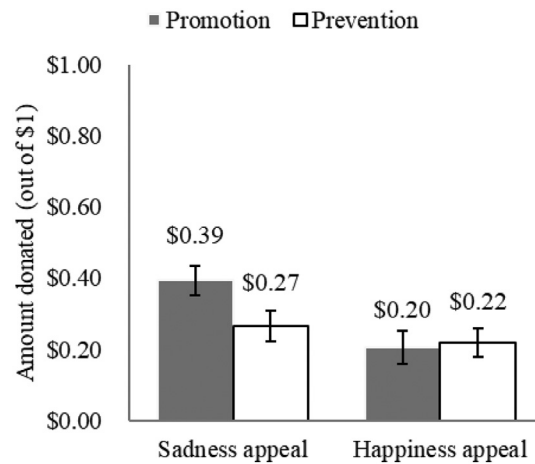


Fig. 2. The amount donated (out of \$1) as a function of regulatory focus and emotion appeal type (Study 1).

compared the effect of a sadness appeal with that of a guilt appeal, another negative emotion appeal widely adopted by charitable organizations (Cotte et al., 2005; Huhmann & Brotherton, 1997). We aim to show that the decreased donation under a prevention focus is a unique response towards a sadness appeal, rather than a general response towards any negative emotion appeals.

3.1. Method

Five hundred and twenty-seven participants were recruited through MTurk and were randomly assigned to one of three emotion appeal conditions: sadness, guilt, and happiness. Following past findings that show attributional tendency (i.e., attribution to the self vs. situation) as one of the key differences triggered by guilt and sadness (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985), the guilt appeal incorporated messages that evoked internal attribution for the sufferings of the victim displayed in the flyer. Specifically, the flyer utilizing the guilt appeal showed a picture of an indulgent chocolate cake alongside a starving child. It also stated, “How much did you spend on chocolate last year? Ten million children suffer from starvation every year. Half of the amount we spend on chocolates each year can nourish those children. They are starving, we are not.” The sadness appeal and the happiness appeal were similar to those used in study 1 (see web appendix for the ads).⁶ As noted in study 1, the sadness appeal described the helpless situations of suffering children due to reasons beyond the victims’ control (i.e., soaring food prices). Because both the sadness appeal and guilt appeal included an image of a suffering child, the text messages were a critical aspect that distinguished the two negative emotion appeals. Hence, we limited our study to native English speakers and included an Instructional Manipulation Check (IMC) that detected participants who might have not paid attention to the text message of the charity flyer (Oppenheimer et al., 2009). Five participants failed in the IMC and thus were removed from our analyses.⁷

To ensure that the emotion appeals elicited the intended emotions, we recruited a separate group of participants from the same pool to conduct a pretest for the emotion appeal manipulation (112 males and 144 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 34.3$ years). As intended, the sadness appeal ($M = 7.25$) triggered greater sadness than the guilt appeal ($M = 6.61$, $F(1, 186) = 3.90$, $p < .05$) and the happiness appeal ($M = 5.59$, $F(1, 159) = 25.00$, $p < .001$). On the other hand, the guilt appeal ($M = 6.12$) evoked more guilt than the sadness appeal ($M = 4.94$, $F(1, 186) = 10.54$, $p = .001$) and the happiness appeal ($M = 4.35$, $F(1, 161) = 21.67$, $p < .001$). Finally, the happiness appeal ($M = 4.26$) triggered more happiness than the sadness appeal ($M = 1.61$, $F(1, 159) = 99.07$, $p < .001$) and the guilt appeal ($M = 2.38$, $F(1, 161) = 38.49$, $p < .001$).

All participants viewed one of the charity flyers according to their emotion appeal condition. Afterwards, they were asked how much they would donate to the charity they saw in the flyer (i.e., World Help) if they had 100 dollars. Next, participants reported their demographic information and then responded to the chronic regulatory focus scale used in study 1.

⁶ In study 2, for the happiness appeal condition, we used one of the child photos used in Small and Verrochi’s (2009) studies. In their original study, the photo was used to manipulate a neutral expression of the victim rather than a happy expression. However, we named our corresponding condition as a happiness appeal (not neutral appeal) condition, following our pretest result.

⁷ Including these participants did not change any of the reported planned contrast results. In addition, including these participants improved the marginally significant partial interaction contrast that compared the sadness appeal condition with the guilt appeal condition to significance ($p = .033$). On the other hand, the partial interaction contrast that compared the sadness appeal condition with the happiness appeal condition became non-significant ($p = .103$). However, note that we find this last interaction significant or marginally significant in six other studies reported in this paper or in the web appendix.

3.2. Results

3.2.1. Regulatory focus

To create the chronic regulatory focus score, the prevention score ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.84$, $\alpha = 0.82$) was subtracted from the promotion score ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 0.64$, $\alpha = 0.71$), which revealed 243 prevention-oriented participants and 284 promotion-oriented participants. The emotion appeal manipulation did not affect participants' chronic regulatory focus ($F_s < 1$).

3.2.2. Hypothetical donation amount

According to Tukey's (1977) procedure, 23 participants (9 from the guilt appeal condition, 10 from the happiness appeal condition, and 4 from the sadness appeal condition; 10 from promotion-focus, 13 from prevention-focus) lied outside of the interval [$Q1 - 1.5 \times IQR$; $Q3 + 1.5 \times IQR$] and qualified as outliers. As such, we used 504 qualified participants for our analysis ($M_{age} = 37.2$ years; 227 males, 273 females, and 4 preferred not to indicate their gender).

To test whether the moderating effect of regulatory focus was unique for the sadness appeal, compared to the other emotion appeals, we computed an interaction that compared the effect of regulatory focus in the sadness appeal condition, to its effect in the other two emotion appeal conditions (combining the happiness appeal and the guilt appeal conditions), and found a significant two-way interaction ($F(1, 500) = 4.79$, $p = .029$). In addition, a partial interaction contrast that directly compared the sadness appeal with only the guilt appeal was marginally significant ($F(1, 498) = 3.83$, $p = .051$), indicating that the impact of donors' regulatory focus on donation amount depended on the type of negative emotion appeal. Specifically, when the sadness appeal was used to raise the donation, prevention-oriented individuals ($M = \$20.04$) donated significantly less out of the hypothetical \$100 than promotion-oriented individuals ($M = \$27.98$, $F(1, 498) = 5.65$, $p = .018$), whereas this difference was not observed when the guilt appeal was used ($M_{prevention} = \$20.33$, $M_{promotion} = \$18.97$; $F < 1$; H1-2). In addition, another partial interaction contrast that directly compared the sadness appeal with only the happiness appeal revealed marginally significant interaction ($F(1, 498) = 3.37$, $p = .067$), again indicating that the impact of donors' regulatory focus depended on the type of emotion appeal. Replicating the results of study 1, regulatory focus did not affect the donation amount when the happiness appeal was used to solicit the donation ($M_{prevention} = \$17.41$, $M_{promotion} = \$16.71$, $F < 1$), although it did when a sadness appeal was used as reported earlier ($p = .018$; Fig. 3; H1-1). Altogether, these results indicate that a prevention (vs. promotion) focus discourages donation uniquely for sadness appeals, compared to happiness appeals or guilt appeals.

3.2.3. Hypothetical decision to donate or not

Although the donation decision was hypothetical, we still conducted an additional analysis to understand whether the effect we observed on the hypothetical donation amount was driven by the decreased proportion of participants who decided to donate under a prevention (vs. promotion) focus when a sadness appeal solicited the donation. A binary logistic regression with emotion appeal (sadness appeal vs. happiness and guilt appeals combined) and chronic regulatory focus as predictors revealed a significant interaction (Wald $X^2 = 4.75$, $df = 1$, $p = .029$). A partial interaction contrast that directly compared the sadness appeal with only the happiness appeal was not significant (Wald $X^2 = 2.17$, $df = 1$, $p > .14$). Still, in the sadness appeal condition, a prevention (vs. promotion) focus reduced the proportion of participants who decided to donate although the difference was not significant ($M_{prevention} = 86\%$, $M_{promotion} = 92\%$, Wald $X^2 = 2.03$, $df = 1$, $p > .15$). In the happiness appeal condition, regulatory focus did not affect the decision ($M_{prevention} = 85\%$, $M_{promotion} = 82\%$, Wald $X^2 = 0.33$, $df = 1$, $p > .56$). On the other hand, another partial interaction contrast that directly compared the sadness appeal with only the guilt appeal was significant (Wald $X^2 = 5.97$, $df = 1$, $p = .015$). Unexpectedly, in the guilt appeal condition, a prevention focus significantly increased the proportion of participants who decided to donate compared to a promotion focus ($M_{prevention} = 91\%$, $M_{promotion} = 79\%$, Wald $X^2 = 4.79$, $df = 1$, $p = .029$). In this study, the reduced donation amount under a prevention (vs. promotion) focus in the sadness appeal condition was not driven by the decreased proportion of participants who made a donation, unlike in study 1 and our later studies in

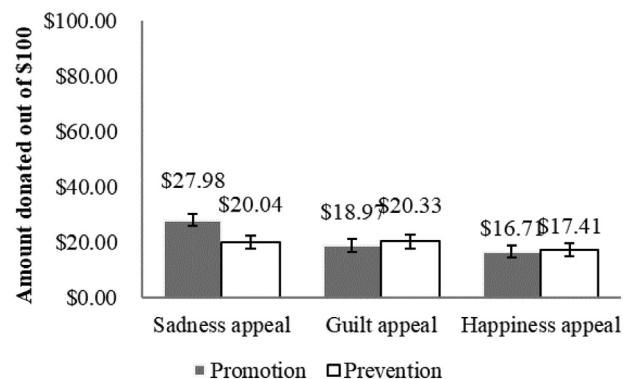


Fig. 3. The amount donated out of hypothetical \$100 as a function of regulatory focus and emotion appeal type (Study 2).

which the donation decision had real financial consequences to participants. We suspect that the hypothetical nature of the decision in this study led to the result that is inconsistent with other studies that measured real donation behaviors.⁸

4. Study 3: mediating role of skepticism and sympathy

The evidence so far indicates that compared to a promotion focus, a prevention focus discourages charitable giving when the donation is solicited with a sadness appeal. Study 3 examines the psychological mechanism underlying this effect. We have proposed that a prevention focus demotivates giving because it activates persuasion knowledge that provokes skepticism against a sadness appeal, leading to disrupted feelings of sympathy, which in turn decreases charitable giving (H2). However, these differences in skepticism, sympathy, and charitable giving would not be observed when donation is solicited by a happiness appeal. We test this chain of process in study 3.

4.1. Method

We recruited 134 participants (74 males and 60 females, $M_{\text{age}} = 36.1$ years) through MTurk and randomly assigned them to see either a sadness appeal or a happiness appeal from World Vision (see web appendix for the actual ads). Next, participants indicated the extent to which they felt sympathy (i.e., sympathetic, compassionate, soft-hearted, and tender; $\alpha = 0.96$; Greitemeyer, 2009) on a nine-point scale (1 = not at all, 9 = very much). They also reported the degree to which they felt skeptical about the appeal on the same scale (i.e., untrustworthy, accurate (R), unconvincing, believable (R), and informative (R); $\alpha = 0.90$; (R) indicates reverse coding; Hallahan, 1999; Kim et al., 2010; Kirmani & Zhu, 2007). Afterwards, participants indicated their donation intention on a five-item (i.e., I would like to make a donation to this organization in the future; I intend to get more information about how I can participate in the donation; After seeing the flyer, I want to make a donation; Are you more likely to make a donation after reading this flyer than before?; How likely are you to participate in a donation in the future? $\alpha = 0.96$), nine-point scale (1 = very unlikely; 9 = very likely). Finally, before reporting their demographic information, participants responded to the chronic regulatory focus scale.

4.2. Results

4.2.1. Regulatory focus

To create the chronic regulatory focus score, the prevention score ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.78$, $\alpha = 0.74$) was subtracted from the promotion score ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 0.66$, $\alpha = 0.68$). Seventy-four participants were identified as promotion-oriented and sixty participants as prevention-oriented. As in the previous studies, the emotion appeal did not affect participants' chronic regulatory focus ($F(1,132) < 1$).

4.2.2. Donation intention

A two-way ANOVA with chronic regulatory focus and emotion appeal as predictors revealed a significant two-way interaction effect on donation intention ($F(1,130) = 4.34$, $p = .039$). Consistent with the results from previous studies, prevention-oriented (vs. promotion-oriented) participants were demotivated from giving when they saw the sadness appeal ($M_{\text{prevention}} = 5.06$, $M_{\text{promotion}} = 6.18$; $F(1, 130) = 4.10$, $p = .045$). However, participants' regulatory orientation did not influence the donation intention when they saw the happiness appeal ($M_{\text{prevention}} = 5.32$, $M_{\text{promotion}} = 4.82$, $F < 1$; Fig. 4).

4.2.3. Skepticism

The same ANOVA revealed a significant interaction effect on skepticism towards the ad ($F(1, 130) = 10.25$, $p = .002$). As expected, prevention-oriented participants were more skeptical of the sadness appeal than promotion-oriented participants ($M_{\text{prevention}} = 3.40$, $M_{\text{promotion}} = 2.32$, $F(1, 130) = 8.66$, $p = .004$). In contrast, the two groups did not differ in the extent to which they felt skeptical of the happiness appeal ($M_{\text{prevention}} = 2.52$, $M_{\text{promotion}} = 3.09$, $F(1, 130) = 2.50$, $p > .11$; Fig. 5 left side). These results indicate that compared to promotion-oriented participants, prevention-oriented participants are more likely to activate persuasion knowledge against a sadness appeal, and this difference is greater for the sadness appeal than for a happiness appeal.

4.2.4. Sympathy

The same two-way ANOVA revealed a marginally significant main effect of chronic regulatory focus ($M_{\text{prevention}} = 6.82$, $M_{\text{promotion}} = 7.35$, $F(1, 130) = 3.05$, $p = .083$). More important, this main effect was qualified by a significant interaction ($F(1, 130) = 4.76$, $p = .031$). Consistent with our expectation, prevention-oriented participants felt less sympathy ($M = 6.56$) than promotion-oriented participants

⁸ We conducted supplementary analyses on the hypothetical donation amount *conditional-on-giving* (excluding those who donated \$0). A main effect of emotion appeal ($M_{\text{sad}} = \$27.32$, $M_{\text{happy+guilt}} = \21.88 ; $F(1, 427) = 5.14$, $p = .024$) and a marginal main effect of regulatory focus was observed ($M_{\text{prevention}} = \22.12 , $M_{\text{promotion}} = \$25.23$; $F(1, 427) = 2.98$, $p = .085$). However, the interaction between emotion appeal (sadness vs. guilt and happiness combined) and regulatory focus was not significant ($F(1, 427) = 1.90$, $p > .16$). In addition, a partial interaction contrast that compared the sadness appeal only with the happiness appeal was not significant ($F(1, 425) = 1.81$, $p > .17$). Another partial interaction contrast that compared the sadness appeal only with the guilt appeal was not significant either ($F(1, 425) = 1.01$, $p > .31$). Note that, in the guilt appeal condition, although a prevention (vs. promotion) focus increased the proportion of participants who decided to donate, it did not decrease the donated amount *conditional-on-giving* ($F(1,425) < 1$, $p > .64$).

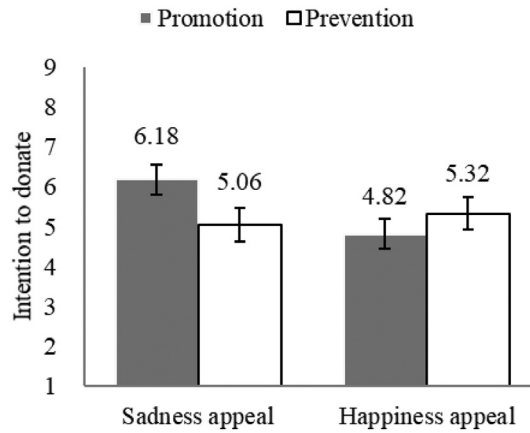


Fig. 4. Donation intention as a function of regulatory focus and emotion appeal type (Study 3).

($M = 7.76$) when they saw the sadness appeal ($F(1, 130) = 7.66, p = .006$), but this difference was not found for the happiness appeal ($M_{prevention} = 7.06, M_{promotion} = 6.92, F < 1$; Fig. 5 right side).

4.2.5. Moderated serial mediation

We conducted a moderated serial mediation analysis to examine whether skepticism and sympathy sequentially mediated the effect of regulatory focus on charitable giving when a sadness appeal was used but not when a happiness appeal was used (H2). Ten thousand bootstrap samples were generated on the entire data, including regulatory focus as the predictor (X: 1 = prevention, 0 = promotion), donation intention as the outcome (Y), skepticism as the first mediator (M_1), sympathy as the second mediator (M_2), and emotion appeal as the moderator (1 = sadness, 0 = happiness) (Blanchard et al., 2016; Hayes, 2015, the macro PROCESS model 6). The results confirmed the hypothesized multi-chain process (H2). Specifically, when the sadness appeal was used to solicit the donation, a prevention (vs. promotion) focus provoked skepticism (path a1 in Fig. 6: $b = 1.08, p < .01$), which in turn decreased sympathy (path a3 in Fig. 6: $b = -0.80, p < .001$), and consequently, the donation intention (path b2 in Fig. 6: $b = 0.46, p < .001$). The 95% bootstrap confidence interval for the multiple mediators' indirect effect ($b = -0.40, CI [-1.0026 to -0.0912]$) corroborated our proposed multi-step mechanism. In the happiness appeal condition, we found no evidence for any indirect effect (Table 1).

4.2.6. Discussion

Study 3 confirmed the proposed multi-chain process. Specifically, a prevention (vs. promotion) focus increased skepticism against a sadness appeal, which in turn decreased feelings of sympathy and charitable giving (H2). However, these differences in skepticism, sympathy, and charitable giving were not observed for a happiness appeal.

Although statistically not significant, a reversed effect of regulatory focus on donation intention was observed in the happiness appeal condition (Fig. 4). In fact, a similar pattern of result was observed in our other studies although the effect was not as evident as in this study. We refrain from overly interpreting the results because none of these differences were statistically

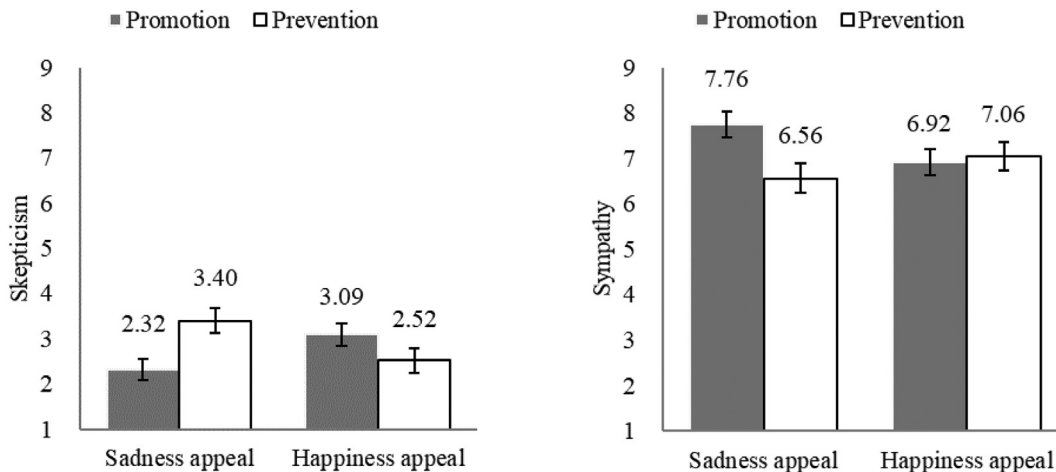
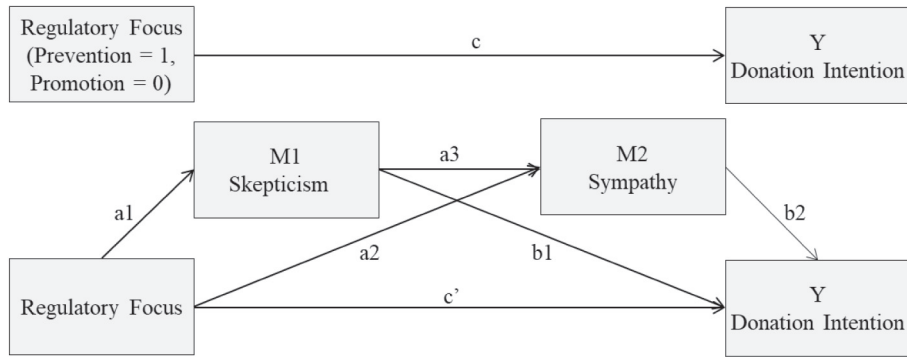


Fig. 5. Self-reported skepticism and sympathy as a function of regulatory focus and emotion appeal type (Study 3).



	Coefficient	SE	t	P
a1	1.08	.37	2.94	< .004
a2	-.33	.33	-1.01	> .31
a3	-.80	.08	-10.54	< .000
b1	-.39	.15	-2.61	< .02
b2	.46	.13	3.61	< .0005
c	-1.12	.56	-2.03	< .05
c'	-.15	.48	-.31	> .75

Fig. 6. The effect of regulatory focus on donation intention mediated by skepticism and sympathy in the sadness appeal condition (Study 3).

significant, and more important, we do not have explanation based on the past literature regarding why this effect would occur. However, we acknowledge that we cannot completely rule out the possibility that there exist past findings based on which the effect can be predicted and that our individual studies may have been underpowered to detect the effect because of the insufficient samples size. Therefore, we conducted a single-paper meta-analysis (SPM) to see if, when aggregated, the effect becomes significant. The SPM did not provide a significant estimate for this effect ($p > .363$), whereas the effect of regulatory focus in the sadness appeal condition was reliable ($p < .001$; see general discussion for detailed SPM results).

5. Study 4: deactivating persuasion knowledge by constraining donors' cognitive capacity

The previous study demonstrated that a prevention (vs. promotion) focus disrupts prospective donors' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses intended by a sad charity appeal. We contended that this happens because a prevention (vs. promotion) focus activates persuasion knowledge against the sadness appeal. In study 4, we provide additional support for this proposition by testing a boundary condition that deactivates persuasion knowledge. Specifically, we examine whether deactivating persuasion knowledge by constraining donors' cognitive capacity attenuates the effect of regulatory focus on charitable giving solicited by a sadness appeal (H3). In contrast, when the cognitive capacity is not constrained and thus persuasion knowledge can be activated, a sadness appeal will decrease charitable giving under a prevention (vs. promotion) focus. Through this test, we aim to corroborate

Table 1
Conditional Indirect Effects of Regulatory Focus on Donation Intention (Study 3)

The sadness appeal condition:				
	Effect	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	SE
X → M ₁ → Y	-.42	-1.14	-.03	.27
X → M ₂ → Y	-.15	-.57	.11	.17
X → M ₁ → M ₂ → Y	-.40	-.10	-.09	.22
The happiness appeal condition:				
	Effect	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	SE
X → M ₁ → Y	.23	-.02	.77	.19
X → M ₂ → Y	-.15	-.56	.11	.16
X → M ₁ → M ₂ → Y	.21	-.01	.63	.16

our proposed mechanism that persuasion knowledge is what provokes skepticism and demotivates giving under a prevention (vs. promotion) focus when a sadness appeal solicits a donation.

5.1. Method

We recruited 241 participants (116 males and 125 females, $M_{\text{age}} = 36.4$ years) through MTurk and randomly assigned them to one of the two cognitive capacity conditions: low vs. high. A memory rehearsal task was used to manipulate their cognitive capacity (Wegner et al., 1993; Yost & Weary, 1996). Participants in the high cognitive capacity condition were asked to memorize a three-digit number (i.e., 801) while viewing a sadness-evoking ad from World Help, whereas participants in the low cognitive capacity condition were asked to rehearse an eight-digit number (e.g., 80,122,131) while viewing the same sadness appeal (see web appendix for the specific ad). Once they finished viewing the ad, participants were asked to report the number they kept in their memory. Sixteen participants (3 from the high cognitive capacity condition, and 13 from the low cognitive capacity condition) did not remember the number.

Next, participants were told that they had been entered in a \$10 lottery as an additional reward for their participation in the study. Participants were asked to specify the amount (out of \$10 lottery winnings) they were willing to pre-commit to World Help, after being informed that this amount would be automatically deducted from the winnings and sent to the charity if they became the winner.⁹ Finally, participants' chronic regulatory focus was measured, and their demographic information was collected.

5.2. Results

5.2.1. Regulatory focus

To create the regulatory focus score, the prevention score ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.83$, $\alpha = 0.79$) was subtracted from the promotion score ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.70$, $\alpha = 0.71$), which revealed 128 promotion-oriented participants and 113 prevention-oriented participants. The cognitive capacity manipulation did not affect participants' regulatory focus ($F < 1$).

5.2.2. Amount pre-committed to a charity

A two-way ANOVA with cognitive capacity and chronic regulatory focus as predictors revealed a significant interaction on the amount pre-committed to the charity ($F(1,237) = 7.32$, $p = .007$). In the high cognitive capacity condition, the sadness appeal was less effective in motivating donation from prevention-oriented participants than from promotion-oriented participants ($M_{\text{prevention}} = \3.60 , $M_{\text{promotion}} = \$5.08$, $F(1, 237) = 5.66$, $p = .018$), replicating the previous results. However, consistent with H3, when participants' cognitive capacity was low, the sadness appeal was equally effective in soliciting donations from all participants regardless of their regulatory focus ($M_{\text{prevention}} = \4.73 , $M_{\text{promotion}} = \$3.90$; $F(1, 237) = 2.02$, $p > .15$; Fig. 7). These results indicate that when cognitive capacity is high, a prevention focus (vs. a promotion focus) activates persuasion knowledge against a sadness appeal, and as a result, impairs charitable giving. In contrast, deactivating the persuasion knowledge by constraining cognitive capacity attenuates the effect of regulatory focus on charitable giving even when a sadness appeal is used to solicit a donation (H3).

5.2.3. Decision to pre-commit to a charity or not

We conducted an additional analysis to understand whether the effect we observed on the amount pre-committed in the high cognitive capacity condition was driven by the decreased proportion of participants who pre-committed some of their winnings to a charity under a prevention (vs. promotion) focus. A binary logistic regression with cognitive capacity and chronic regulatory focus as predictors revealed a significant interaction (Wald $X^2 = 6.51$, $df = 1$, $p = .011$). In the high cognitive capacity condition, the percentage of participants who pre-committed some of their lottery winnings was significantly less when participants were prevention-focused ($M = 74\%$) than when promotion-focused ($M = 90\%$; Wald $X^2 = 5.50$, $df = 1$, $p = .019$). In contrast, regulatory focus did not affect the pre-commitment decision when the cognitive capacity was low and thus persuasion knowledge was deactivated ($M_{\text{prevention}} = 85\%$, $M_{\text{promotion}} = 74\%$, Wald $X^2 = 2.24$, $df = 1$, $p > .13$).¹⁰

6. Study 5: attenuating persuasion knowledge by informing charity reliability

In the next study, we further substantiate our mechanism by exploring another boundary condition with greater practical relevance. That is, we examine whether the reputation of a charity as a reliable organization attenuates persuasion knowledge. We manipulate the reputation by providing charity reliability scores to participants. As a response to the growing concern about the reliability of charities, several organizations (e.g., Charity Navigator) have started to evaluate the reliability of charities and disseminate this information to the public. We expect that when participants are informed that a charity received a high

⁹ A winner was announced at the completion of the study, and the pre-committed amount was donated while the winner received the rest of the winnings.

¹⁰ A supplementary ANOVA was conducted to examine the effect of cognitive capacity and chronic regulatory focus on the pre-committed amount conditional-on-giving. None of the effects were significant (p 's $> .19$). These results indicate that the pre-committed amount which was reduced under a prevention (vs. promotion) focus in the high cognitive capacity condition was indeed driven by the decreased proportion of participants who decided to pre-commit to a charity under a prevention (vs. promotion) focus.

The Amount Pre-committed (Out of \$10)

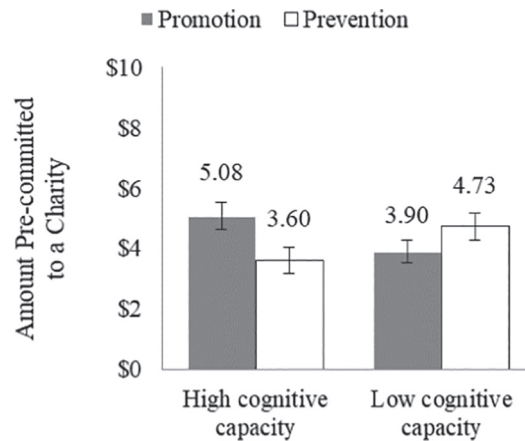


Fig. 7. The moderating effect of constraining cognitive capacity (Study 4).

reliability score, this information would attenuate their persuasion knowledge against the ad communicated by this charity. As a result, their regulatory focus would no longer affect skepticism, sympathy, and giving even when a sadness appeal is used to solicit the donation, as when a happiness appeal is used (H4).

6.1. Method

Three hundred and ninety three participants were recruited through MTurk (159 males and 234 females, $M_{age} = 37.1$ years) and were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions in a 2 (primed regulatory focus: promotion vs. prevention) x 2 (emotion appeal: sadness vs. happiness) x 2 (charity reliability: low vs. high) between-subjects design.

The study consisted of two ostensibly unrelated tasks. In the first task, we manipulated regulatory focus by priming either ideals or oughts (Freitas & Higgins, 2002; Higgins et al., 1994) as in supplementary study A (see web appendix). Specifically, participants in the promotion condition were asked to write about their past and current dreams, hopes, and aspirations, whereas those in the prevention condition wrote about their past and current duties, obligations, and responsibilities (Freitas & Higgins, 2002; Higgins et al., 1994). After the writing task, participants responded to two questions that intended to strengthen the priming effect. In the promotion condition, the questions asked the extent to which participants liked the dreams, hopes, and aspirations they wrote earlier, and the extent to which they have achieved them. In the prevention condition, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they believed they ought to complete the duties, obligations, and responsibilities they wrote earlier, and the extent to which they have achieved them. Next, participants responded to a manipulation check for primed regulatory focus. They indicated the extent to which oughts versus dreams were important to them on a seven-point scale (i.e., what is more important for you to do? what to ought (1) ~ what to dream (7); Chatterjee et al., 2011; Keller, 2006).

At the beginning of the second task, participants were informed that they were about to see a promotional flyer from World Help. Before seeing the flyer, participants were provided with the information on the reliability of World Help. In the high [low] charity reliability condition, participants were told that the charity received 98/100 [70/100] scores from an international organization that monitors charity reliability and publishes organizational reliability scores. Participants were told that the score reflected (1) the financial performance as well as (2) the accountability and transparency performance metrics of the charity. A pretest (30 males and 50 females, $M_{age} = 39.3$ years) confirmed that participants evaluated the charity to be more reliable (measured on a five item, seven-point scale¹¹) when the reliability score was high compared to when it was low (5.91 vs. 3.77; $F(1, 78) = 67.82, p < .001$).

Afterwards, all participants saw either a sadness appeal or a happiness appeal from World Help, similar to the appeals used in studies 1, 2, and 4¹² (see web appendix for the actual appeals). Next, participants were asked to pre-commit the amount they wished to donate to the charity (out of \$10 lottery winnings) as in study 4.¹³ Participants then responded to the extent to which they felt skepticism ($\alpha = 0.97$) and sympathy ($\alpha = 0.86$) on the nine-point scale items that were identical to those used in study 3. However, unlike in study 3, we measured skepticism and sympathy after participants had pre-committed their winnings in order to eliminate any potential effect that responding to these process measures has on the amount pre-

¹¹ Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they believed the organization (1) was trustworthy, (2) was reliable, (3) used its assets wisely, (4) was financially sound, and (5) was well managed: 1 (strongly disagree) ~ 7 (strongly agree); $\alpha = 0.98$.

¹² We conducted another pretest (44 males and 62 females, $M_{age} = 36.4$ years) to ensure that this new pair of ads elicited intended emotions (sadness vs. happiness). As intended, sadness appeal ($M = 6.13$) elicited more sadness than the happiness appeal ($M = 4.25$; $F(1, 104) = 13.48, p < .001$). On the other hand, the happiness appeal triggered more happiness ($M = 4.28$) than the sadness appeal ($M = 2.02$, $F(1, 104) = 27.72, p < .001$).

¹³ As in study 4, at the completion of the study, the amount pre-committed by the lottery winner was donated, and the rest of the winnings was paid to the winner.

committed. Finally, participants reported their demographic information, and then were debriefed that the organization reliability score was a bogus score created for the purpose of the study.

6.2. Results

6.2.1. Regulatory focus manipulation check

As intended, participants primed with a promotion focus reported doing what they dream (vs. what they ought) is important, more than those primed with a prevention focus ($M_{\text{promotion}} = 4.34$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = 3.42$; $F(1, 391) = 24.64$, $p < .001$).

6.2.2. Amount pre-committed to a charity

We conducted a three-way ANOVA with primed regulatory focus, emotion appeal, and charity reliability as predictors. A significant main effect of charity reliability on the amount pre-committed emerged ($M_{\text{high}} = \$4.36$, $M_{\text{low}} = \$3.25$, $F(1, 385) = 12.55$, $p < .001$), indicating that participants pre-committed a greater amount of money when the charity reliability was high than when it was low. A significant main effect of emotion appeal was observed as well ($M_{\text{sadness}} = \$4.10$, $M_{\text{happiness}} = \$3.49$, $F(1, 385) = 4.68$, $p = .031$). More important, these main effects were qualified by a significant three-way interaction ($F(1, 385) = 6.72$, $p = .01$). In the low charity reliability condition, the two-way interaction between primed regulatory focus and emotion appeal was marginally significant ($F(1, 385) = 2.84$, $p = .093$). The follow-up planned contrasts confirmed that a prevention focus (vs. a promotion focus) decreased the amount pre-committed to the charity when participants saw a sadness appeal ($M_{\text{prevention}} = \2.68 , $M_{\text{promotion}} = \$3.89$, $F(1, 385) = 4.08$, $p = .044$), but not when they saw a happiness appeal ($M_{\text{prevention}} = \3.41 , $M_{\text{promotion}} = \$3.17$, $F < 1$; H4). Unexpectedly, in the high charity reliability condition, the two-way interaction between primed regulatory focus and emotion appeal was significant ($F(1, 385) = 3.91$, $p = .049$). However, consistent with H4, the planned contrasts revealed no difference between the regulatory foci both in the sadness appeal condition ($M_{\text{prevention}} = \5.51 , $M_{\text{promotion}} = \$4.54$, $F(1, 385) = 2.67$, $p > .10$) and in the happiness appeal condition ($M_{\text{prevention}} = \3.34 , $M_{\text{promotion}} = \$4.06$, $F(1, 385) = 1.37$, $p > .24$; Fig. 8).

6.2.3. Decision to pre-commit to a charity or not

We also examined if the proportion of participants who pre-committed some of their winnings to a charity showed a similar pattern of results. A binary logistic regression with emotion appeal, regulatory focus, and charity reliability as predictors revealed a significant main effect of charity reliability (Wald $X^2 = 12.59$, $df = 1$, $p = .000$) and a significant main effect of emotion appeal (Wald $X^2 = 4.27$, $df = 1$, $p = .039$). Although the three-way interaction was not significant (Wald $X^2 = 1.87$, $df = 1$, $p > .17$), the planned contrasts revealed results consistent with our expectation. Specifically, when the sadness appeal was used by a non-reliable charity (i.e., the sadness appeal/low charity reliability condition), the percentage of participants who decided to pre-commit to the charity was significantly less in the prevention focus condition ($M = 59\%$) than in the promotion focus condition ($M = 78\%$; Wald $X^2 = 4.35$, $df = 1$, $p = .037$). However, the simple contrasts between the regulatory orientations were not significant in the other three emotion appeal/charity reliability conditions (all contrast p 's > 0.37).¹⁴

6.2.4. Skepticism

A three-way ANOVA with the same three predictors revealed a significant main effect of charity reliability (3.17 vs. 4.22; $F(1, 385) = 42.57$, $p < .001$), indicating that participants were less skeptical about the appeal when charity reliability was high (vs. low). This main effect was qualified by a significant three-way interaction ($F(1, 385) = 4.00$, $p = .046$). In the low charity reliability condition, a two-way interaction between regulatory focus and emotion appeal was marginally significant ($F(1, 385) = 3.40$, $p = .066$). Replicating the effect observed in study 3, a prevention focus provoked skepticism more than a promotion focus when the sadness appeal was used to solicit the donation ($M_{\text{prevention}} = 4.35$, $M_{\text{promotion}} = 3.71$, $F(1, 385) = 4.14$, $p = .043$), but not when the happiness appeal was used ($M_{\text{prevention}} = 4.27$, $M_{\text{promotion}} = 4.46$, $F < 1$). In contrast, in the high charity reliability condition, the two-way interaction between regulatory focus and emotion appeal was not significant ($F < 1$), indicating that the reputation as a reliable charity attenuated participants' persuasion knowledge, and as a result, a prevention (vs. promotion) focus no longer provoked skepticism towards the sadness appeal (Fig. 9).

6.2.5. Sympathy

A three-way ANOVA with the same three predictors revealed a significant main effect of emotion appeal ($M_{\text{sadness}} = 6.71$, $M_{\text{happiness}} = 6.29$, $F(1, 385) = 4.79$, $p = .029$). More important, the main effect was qualified by a marginally significant three-way interaction ($F(1, 385) = 2.75$, $p = .098$). In the low charity reliability condition, a significant two-way interaction between regulatory focus and emotion appeal was observed ($F(1, 385) = 4.27$, $p = .039$). Specifically, the sadness appeal decreased

¹⁴ We conducted a supplementary analysis to examine the *conditional-on-giving* amount. An ANOVA with primed regulatory focus, emotion appeal, and charity reliability as predictors revealed a significant three-way interaction effect ($F(1, 299) = 4.28$, $p = .039$). In the low charity reliability condition, the two-way interaction was not significant ($F(1, 299) = 1.04$, $p > .30$). The simple contrasts further confirmed that regulatory focus did not influence the *conditional-on-giving* amount neither in the sadness appeal condition nor in the happiness appeal condition (p 's > 0.46). The results indicate that the decreased amount pre-committed under a prevention (vs. promotion) focus in the sadness appeal/low charity reliability condition observed in Fig. 8 was driven by the reduced proportion of participants who decided to pre-commit some of their winnings to a charity under a prevention focus. Unexpectedly, in the high charity reliability condition, the two-way interaction between primed regulatory focus and emotion appeal was marginally significant ($F(1, 299) = 3.80$, $p = .052$), but no significant simple effect of regulatory focus was observed in any of the emotion appeal conditions (p 's > 0.14).

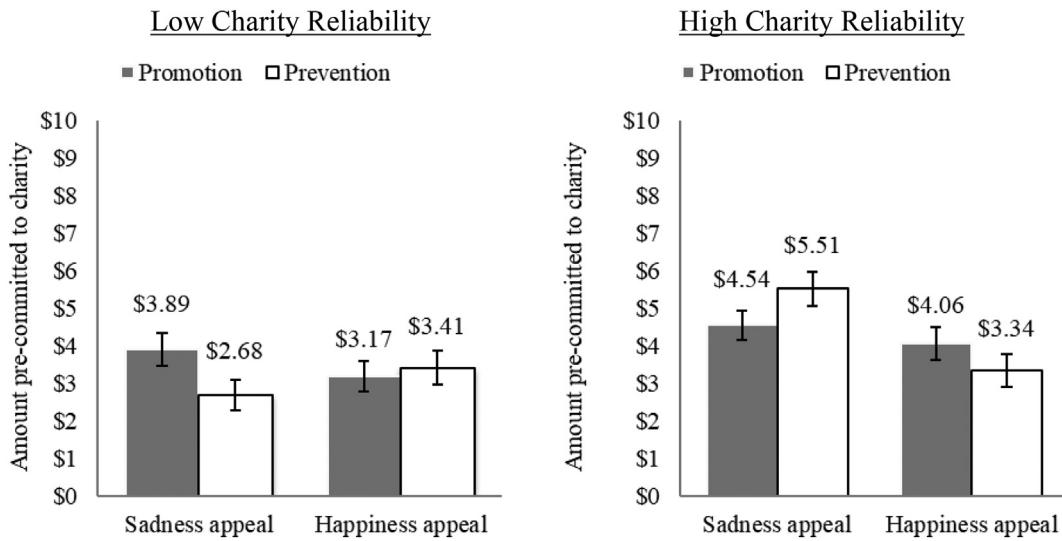


Fig. 8. The moderating role of charity reliability on the amount pre-committed to a charity (out of \$10; Study 5).

sympathy under a prevention (vs. promotion) focus ($M_{\text{prevention}} = 6.26, M_{\text{promotion}} = 7.14, F(1, 385) = 4.69, p = .031$), but the difference was not observed in the happiness appeal condition ($M_{\text{prevention}} = 6.26, M_{\text{promotion}} = 5.93, F < 1$). In the high charity reliability condition, the two-way interaction between regulatory focus and emotion appeal was not significant ($F < 1$; Fig. 10).

6.2.6. Moderated serial mediation

We tested whether skepticism and sympathy sequentially mediated the effect of regulatory focus on the amount pre-committed only when a sadness appeal was used by a charity with low reliability, but not when a sadness appeal was used by a highly reliable charity or when a happiness appeal was used. As in study 3, we followed the method suggested by Hayes (2015, model 6) and Blanchard et al. (2016) and generated ten thousand bootstrapping samples on the entire data. The model included regulatory focus as the predictor (X : prevention = 1, promotion = 0), the amount pre-committed as the outcome (Y), skepticism as the first mediator (M_1), sympathy as the second mediator (M_2), emotion appeal as the first moderator (W_1 : sadness appeal = 1, happiness appeal = 0), and charity reliability as the second moderator (W_2 : low = 1, high = 0). The results confirmed the proposed chain of mediators—skepticism (M_1) and sympathy (M_2)—mediated the effect of regulatory focus on the amount pre-committed only when the sadness appeal was used by a low reliability charity. Specifically, in the sadness appeal/low charity reliability condition, prevention (vs. promotion) focused participants were more skeptical about the sadness appeal (path a1 in Fig. 11: $b = 0.64, p < .05$), which resulted

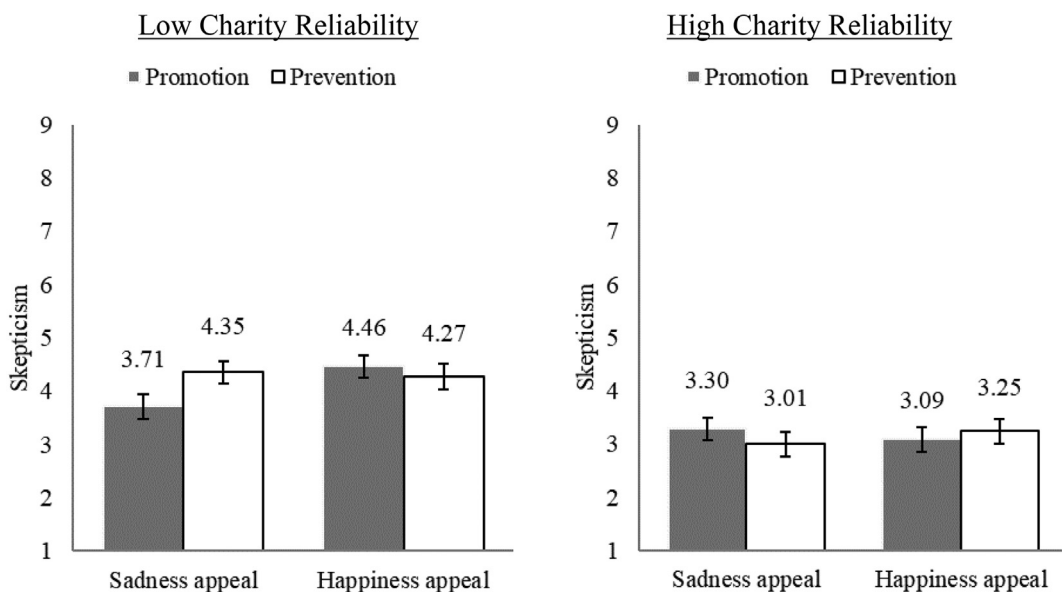


Fig. 9. The moderating role of charity reliability on self-reported skepticism (Study 5).

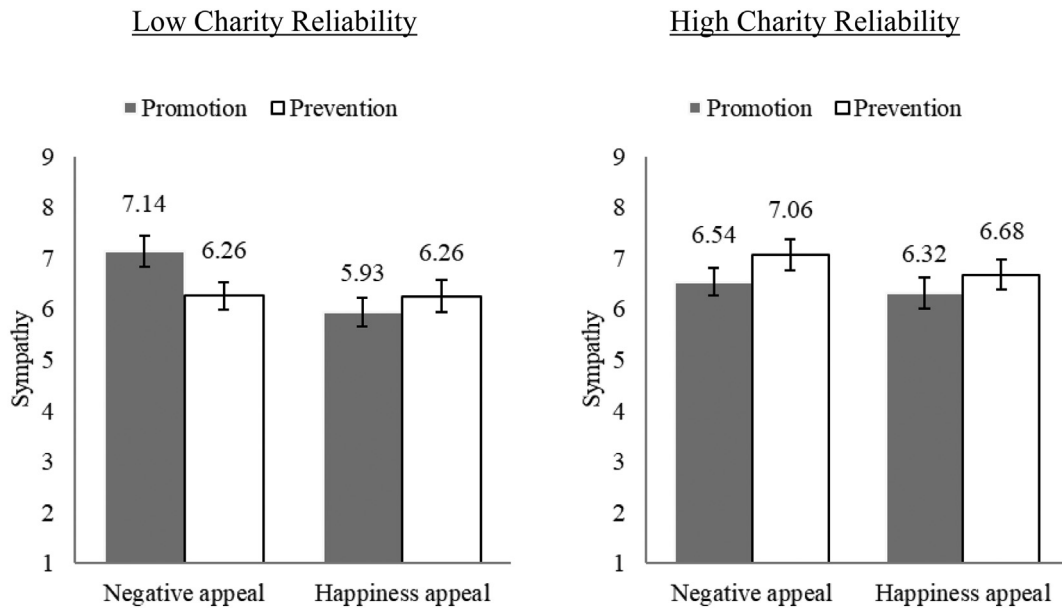
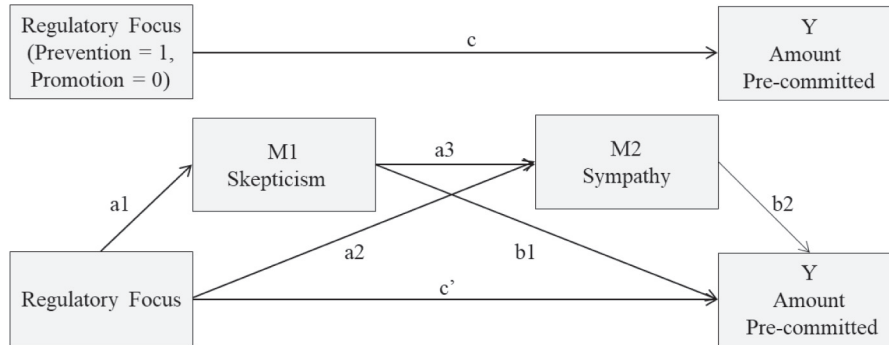


Fig. 10. The moderating role of charity reliability on self-reported sympathy (Study 5).

in the reduced level of sympathy (path a3 in Fig. 11: $b = -0.77, p < .001$) and in the decreased amount pre-committed for the charity (path b2 in Fig. 11: $b = 0.32, p < .001$). The 95% bootstrap confidence interval for the multiple mediators' indirect effect did not include zero ($b = -0.16, CI [-0.377 \text{ to } -0.023]$) in the sadness appeal/low charity reliability condition. We did not observe any indirect effect in the other three conditions (Table 2).



	Coefficient	SE	t	P
a1	.64	.31	2.04	< .05
a2	-.39	.33	-1.19	> .23
a3	-.77	.05	-14.31	< .000
b1	-.34	.11	-2.99	< .003
b2	.32	.09	3.67	< .0004
c	-1.21	.60	-2.02	< .05
c'	-.71	.57	-1.26	> .20

Fig. 11. The effect of regulatory focus on amount pre-committed to a charity mediated by skepticism and sympathy in the sadness appeal/low charity reliability condition (Study 5).

Table 2

Conditional Indirect Effects of Regulatory Focus on the Amount Pre-committed to a Charity (Study 5)

The sadness appeal + low reliability condition:				
	Effect	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	Boot SE
$X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow Y$	-.22	-.56	-.03	.13
$X \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$	-.13	-.37	.04	.09
$X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$	-.16	-.38	-.02	.09
Other conditions:				
$X \rightarrow M_1 \rightarrow M_2 \rightarrow Y$	Effect	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI	Boot SE
Sadness + High Reliability	.07	-.07	.26	.08
Happiness + Low Reliability	.05	-.10	.23	.08
Happiness + High Reliability	-.04	-.21	.12	.08

7. Study 6: segmenting donors based on the Eastern versus Western culture

The purpose of the final study is to demonstrate the practical utility of understanding the role of regulatory focus in changing the effectiveness of a sad charity appeal. Using an observable variable that is highly correlated with donors' regulatory orientation (i.e., cultural differences), study 6 aims to show that segmenting donors based on such donor characteristics is necessary for charities before utilizing a sadness appeal. Lee et al. (2000) show that individuals with an independent self-construal (e.g., North Americans) are promotion focused, compared to individuals with an interdependent self-construal (e.g., East Asians) who tend to be prevention focused. Building on this finding, we predict that sadness appeals will demotivate donations among East Asians compared to among North Americans, whereas happiness (vs. sadness) appeals will be less likely to show such a difference between the two cultural groups.

7.1. Method

We recruited 234 students from two large universities, one located in Hong Kong ($N = 113$) and the other located in the Midwest of the US ($N = 121$). Participants were randomly assigned to view a charity flyer that adopted either the sadness appeal or the happiness appeal used in study 1. After viewing the flyer, participants indicated their donation intention on the five-item, nine-point scale used in study 3 ($\alpha = 0.90$). Participants then reported their demographic information and responded to the chronic regulatory focus scale used in study 1.

7.2. Results

7.2.1. Donation intention

According to the Tukey's (1977) procedure, 12 participants (9 from the happiness appeal condition and 3 from the sadness appeal condition; 9 from Hong Kong, 3 from the Midwest in the US) lied outside of the interval [$Q1 - 1.5 \times IQR$; $Q3 + 1.5 \times IQR$] and qualified as outliers. We removed these outliers and used 222 qualified participants for our analysis (77 males, 145 females; $M_{age} = 21.7$ years). A two-way ANOVA with culture and emotion appeal as predictors revealed a significant main effect of emotion appeal ($M_{sad} = 5.53$, $M_{happy} = 4.83$; $F(1, 218) = 10.83$, $p = .001$) and a significant main effect of culture ($M_{Eastern} = 4.94$, $M_{Western} = 5.44$; $F(1, 218) = 5.58$, $p = .019$). More important, these main effects were qualified by a marginally significant interaction effect ($F(1, 218) = 2.95$, $p = .087$). The follow-up planned contrasts revealed that when participants viewed the sadness appeal, participants from the Eastern culture (i.e., Hong Kong; $M = 5.09$) were significantly less willing to donate than participants from the Western culture (i.e., the Midwest of the US; $M = 5.96$, $F(1, 218) = 9.23$, $p = .003$). However, culture did not affect donation intention when participants viewed the happiness appeal ($M_{Eastern} = 4.75$, $M_{Western} = 4.89$, $F(1, 218) < 1$; Fig. 12).

7.2.2. Regulatory focus

A one-way ANOVA with culture as a predictor revealed a significant difference in the chronic regulatory focus score ($M_{Eastern} = 0.03$, $M_{Western} = 0.28$, $F(1, 220) = 5.56$, $p = .019$), indicating that participants from the Eastern [Western] culture were relatively more prevention [promotion] oriented.

8. General discussion

Despite the prevalent use of sadness appeals in charity ads, past research offers inconsistent findings on whether sadness appeals motivate or demotivate charitable giving. Our research attempted to reconcile these conflicting perspectives by introducing prospective donors' regulatory focus. Consistent with the past mixed findings, we found inconsistent main effects of emotion appeal on charitable giving depending on the stimuli used in our studies. Specifically, while study 3 and supplementary study A did not show a significant main effect of emotion appeal, studies 1, 5, 6, and supplementary study B showed a significant main effect, which indicated that the sadness appeals used in those studies were more effective in raising donations than the happiness appeals. Despite these inconsistent main effects, we found a consistent interaction between regulatory focus and



Fig. 12. Donation intention as a function of culture and emotion appeal type (Study 6).

emotion appeal across our studies. Compared to a promotion focus, a prevention focus decreased the real amount donated to a charity (study 1), hypothetical donation amount (study 2), donation intention (studies 3, 6, and supplementary study A), and the amount pre-committed to a charity (studies 4, 5 and supplementary study B) when the donation was solicited with a sadness appeal. However, the difference was not observed when a happiness appeal or a guilt appeal was used (H1-1 and H1-2). These effects were replicated across different ad stimuli, and across regulatory focus that was measured, temporarily primed, or operationalized using associated donor characteristics (i.e., culture).

We also examined the mechanism underlying these effects by directly measuring the factors driving the effects: skepticism and sympathy (studies 3 and 5). Compared to a promotion focus, a prevention focus was more likely to activate persuasion knowledge that provoked skepticism towards the sadness appeal, leading to decreased sympathy and overall giving (H2). Furthermore, we examined the underlying process by identifying boundary conditions for our proposed effects (studies 4 and 5). Specifically, study 4 examined a theoretically important boundary condition—that is, deactivating donors' persuasion knowledge by constraining their cognitive capacity. Constraining prospective donors' cognitive capacity resulted in an equal amount of giving from donors with different regulatory foci even when a sadness appeal was used to solicit the donation (H3). Study 5 tested a boundary condition with practical importance—that is, mitigating persuasion knowledge through a credible reputation of a charity. When donors were informed that the charity was reliable, regulatory focus no longer influenced skepticism, sympathy, and overall giving, although a sadness appeal called for the donation.

Theoretical Contributions.

By reconciling the conflicting perspectives on whether sadness-evoking charity appeals motivate or demotivate donation, our research made several important theoretical contributions. First, we contribute to existing literatures on emotion, regulatory focus, and persuasion knowledge by explaining that, due to its appraisal of loss in personal control, sadness is an emotion that is particularly relevant to a prevention focus which tends to be vigilant against one's loss of control. Because sadness appeals and a prevention focus both pertain to a sense of loss of control, they together trigger persuasion knowledge that tries to maintain the control against manipulative persuasion influences. We corroborate this claim by comparing a sadness appeal and a guilt appeal and show that the moderating effect of regulatory focus is unique to sadness appeals and does not generalize to guilt appeals, which are associated with the appraisal of high personal control (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985).

Second, our research extends the findings of Kirmani and Zhu (2007) in a few important ways. By uncovering the special relationship between sadness appeals and a prevention focus, we show that sadness appeals function as a trigger of persuasion knowledge under a prevention focus, as ambiguous ad claims did in the studies of Kirmani and Zhu (2007). However, we find that the processes through which sadness appeals and ambiguous claims activate persuasion knowledge differ. Whereas ambiguous ad claims signal an ambiguous (or moderate) level of perceived manipulative intent, which calls for further evaluation of their adequacy through the activation of persuasion knowledge under a prevention focus, sad charity appeals activate persuasion knowledge under a prevention focus because sadness appeals are associated with the appraisal of low personal control, which increases prevention-focused donors' concern for the potential loss of their control over their donation decision due to inadequate persuasion influences. Furthermore, our findings clarify that a prevention focus activates persuasion knowledge against potentially inadequate persuasion attempts not just because of its innate vigilance against losses or mismatches to their desired end state (as suggested by Kirmani & Zhu, 2007) but because of its vigilance specifically against the loss of personal control. Since past research suggests that persuasion knowledge is activated to maintain one's control over ad influences (Friestad & Wright, 1994) and skepticism is instigated when a threat is posed to this control (Baek & Morimoto, 2012; Miron & Brehm, 2006), a prevention focus seems to activate persuasion knowledge to protect one's control over inadequate ad influences, particularly when it encounters a sadness appeal which is associated with a sense of low control.

8.1. Practical contributions

Although past research has attempted to uncover moderators for the effectiveness of emotion appeals (e.g., guilt or fear appeals), the efforts have not been fruitful. For instance, emotion intensity has been studied as a possible moderator in past studies, but the results have been inconsistent. While several studies find that overly intensive emotion appeals backfire on triggering desired behaviors from target audiences, other studies fail to show such an effect (Bennett, 1998; Coulter & Pinto, 1995; Ray & Wilkie, 1970; Rotfeld, 1988; Snipes et al., 1999). These inconsistent results imply that a standard way to assess whether an emotion appeal is overly intense or appropriate remains elusive. Even if there is a level of appeal intensity that is “just right,” how to determine the right level is unclear. The adequate level would differ across individuals as well as across situations even for an individual. Accordingly, the practical utility of emotion intensity as a moderator can be questioned.

In contrast, we introduce regulatory focus as a moderator of donors' skepticism towards a *given* sadness appeal, and thereby, offer more practical ways for charities to manage donor skepticism and raise donations. Because potential donors' regulatory orientation correlates highly with observable variables, such as donors' geographical or ethnic cultures, our findings provide practical utility of using regulatory focus (i.e., using the correlated variables) to segment potential donors before targeting them with a sadness appeal, as demonstrated in study 6. New technologies, such as text-mining and individual-level targeting, offer additional novel opportunities to utilize our findings. For instance, analyzing individual-level data (e.g., keywords related to ideals vs. oughts) collected from blogs, social network postings, or browsing history would provide sufficient insight into a potential donor's regulatory focus. Based on this understanding, charities would know whether it is appropriate to adopt a sadness appeal when targeting an individual, hence minimizing potential donor skepticism.

In addition, charities may increase the effectiveness of their sadness-evoking ads by directly manipulating promotion focus using the messages communicated through the ads, while avoiding the elicitation of prevention focus. For instance, when utilizing sadness appeals, charities can emphasize promotion-focused goals or benefits (e.g., helping victims accomplish their dreams), rather than prevention-focused goals or benefits (e.g., ensuring the safety of the victims) in their ad messages (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Lee & Aaker, 2004). Charities may also highlight gains of helping victims rather than losses of not helping them in their sadness appeals, which would temporarily prime promotion focus instead of prevention focus (Aaker & Lee, 2001).

Finally, our research highlights potential ethical issues related to evoking sadness to raise donations. Our findings show that individuals can evaluate the same sadness appeal as either adequate or inadequate depending on their cognitive capacity (study 4). Because people are becoming increasingly busy (Kim et al., 2019), their cognitive capacity may be frequently constrained. Consequently, they are more likely to accept sadness-evoking charity ads and be influenced by them. Policy-makers should pay greater attention to whether it is ethical for charities to target busy prospective donors with sadness-evoking ads and discuss the conditions under which charities can be permitted versus restricted of employing such practices.

Limitations and Future Research.

Although none of our studies revealed a significant effect of regulatory focus on donors' response towards a happiness appeal, we did observe the pattern in several studies that prevention (vs. promotion) focus increased charitable giving when a happiness appeal solicited the donation. Since our individual studies could have been underpowered to detect the effect due to the insufficient samples size, we conducted a single-paper meta-analysis (SPM) to test if, when aggregated, the effect becomes significant (McShane & Böckenholt, 2017). The SPM consisted of five studies, including the two supplementary studies, which adopted the experimental design of 2 regulatory focus \times 2 emotion appeal (sadness vs. happiness). The SPM estimated a significant interaction effect between emotion appeal (1 = sadness, 0 = happiness) and donors' regulatory focus (1 = prevention, 0 = promotion) on charitable giving (interaction estimate = -1.37 , $p \leq 0.002$, $SE = 0.43$). In the sadness appeal condition, the SPM revealed a significant simple effect of regulatory focus ($z = -3.567$; contrast estimate = -1.09 , $p \leq 0.001$, $SE = 0.31$), validating our proposition that prevention focus reliably reduces the effectiveness of sadness appeals. In contrast, in the happiness appeal condition, the SPM did not provide a significant estimate for the simple effect of regulatory focus ($z = 0.91$; contrast estimate = 0.28 , $p \geq 0.363$, $SE = 0.31$), suggesting that the non-reliable effect of regulatory focus for happiness appeals observed in our individual studies may not be due to insufficient sample sizes.

Nevertheless, it may still be possible that under certain circumstances, regulatory focus may moderate the effect of emotion appeals other than sadness appeals. In particular, we do not claim that regulatory focus can never moderate the effect of guilt appeals on charitable giving based on the null effect we observed from a single study. When the manipulative intent behind the happiness or guilt appeals is moderately salient, prevention-oriented donors may be more likely to activate persuasion knowledge than promotion-oriented donors, similar to when ambiguous ad claims were perceived to be moderately manipulative in past studies (Kirmani & Zhu, 2007). Still, due to the sense of low personal control associated with a sadness appeal that increases donors' sensitivity to the manipulative intent behind the appeal, we expect that the moderating effect of regulatory focus on donors' response towards sadness appeals will not be limited to when the salience of the manipulative intent behind the sadness appeals is moderate. For instance, even when the manipulative intent is not so salient, regulatory focus is likely to moderate the effectiveness of sadness appeals, which is less likely in the cases of happiness appeals or guilt appeals. Future research can examine whether the salience of manipulative intent behind an emotion appeal and donors' regulatory focus interact to affect charitable giving when guilt or happiness appeals are used to solicit donation, whereas only the main effect of regulatory focus is reliable when sadness appeals are used, regardless of the salience of the manipulative intent behind the sadness appeals.

Earlier, we noted that charities can try manipulating promotion focus by utilizing gain-framed messages in their sadness appeals while avoiding loss-framed messages that elicit prevention focus based on past studies (Aaker & Lee, 2001). However, other studies suggest that gain- or loss-framed messages may not be a direct manipulation of regulatory focus although each

framing may fit better with a particular type of regulatory focus (Lee & Aaker, 2004). Specifically, loss-framed [gain-framed] ads that emphasize the loss of not using [the benefit of using] a product are perceived to be more persuasive to consumers who pursue a prevention-oriented [promotion-oriented] goals (e.g., safety vs. enjoyment; Lee & Aaker, 2004). That is, a greater value is perceived when consumers' goals are attained by message framing that fits their regulatory orientation (Higgins, 2000; E.T. Higgins et al., 2003). Hence, a possible avenue for future research is to explore when a loss-framed message primes prevention focus and demotivates charitable giving if used along with a sadness appeal, and when it fits with prevention-oriented donors and as a result increases giving.

Furthermore, based on the regulatory fit theory, it is possible to expect that sadness (vs. happiness) appeals associated with an appraisal of a loss could fit better with a prevention focus than with a promotion-focus and, as a result, increase donations under a prevention focus. Interestingly, our results ruled out this alternative possibility, indicating the difference between the appraisal of loss and the feelings of sadness. That is, the appraisal of loss may fit with a prevention focus to increase donation, but the feelings of sadness instigate skepticism and demotivate charitable giving. Indeed, Keltner et al. (1993) show that inducing sadness leads to increased attribution to uncontrollable situational factors in subsequent causal judgments, but inducing the appraisal of situational control alone (without the induction of sadness) does not lead to such a carryover effect on subsequent causal judgments. Therefore, future research can examine the difference between eliciting the loss appraisal versus feelings of sadness under a prevention focus to understand the conditions under which a prevention focus motivates or demotivates charitable giving.

Web Appendix. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2020.08.005>.

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