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## Persuasive Strategies and Hats Off for Cancer Donations

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## Persuasive Strategies and Hats Off for Cancer Donations

By Janae Masnovi

### Introduction

What types of persuasive appeals are most effective in nonprofit advertising? This question has been investigated in various studies, and it continues to be an important point of interest. The *New York Times* estimates that people come in contact with advertisements 5,000 times a day (Story, 2007). Advertising is a process in which both the organization and the audience actively participate (Chandy, Tellis, MacInnis, & Thaivanich, 2001). Many different appeals are used to gain compliance from the audience. Aristotle presented three persuasive techniques—path, logos, and ethos—that

play a significant role in changing audience beliefs. The first technique is pathos, Greek for “suffering” or “experience” (Henning, 1998). Pathos appeals to the audience’s emotions and identity. Logos, or “word,” uses logic and evidence to convince the audience (Henning, 1998). Finally, ethos establishes the good “character” and credibility of the author (Henning, 1998). These three appeals have been used for over 2,000 years due to their power to convince.

Choosing the right persuasive strategy is an intentional and essential practice for organizations. This is particularly an issue for nonprofits as they have an overt ethical responsibility to the public. The number of nonprofits is increasing rapidly. “Between 2001 and 2011, the number of nonprofits has increased 25 percent, to 1,574,674 million, and the growth rate of the nonprofit sector has surpassed the rate of both the business and government sectors” (Urban Institute, 2012). Although nonprofits have a different goal than most businesses, they too must advertise and fundraise to keep their organizations running. It is important for nonprofits to know which strategies are most effective in regards to their specific organizations as well as for consumers to recognize and respond to these appeals. The type of persuasive strategy used can affect both the behavior of the audience and the perception of the organization in the public.

In order for the audience to react, they must have both the ability and motivation to do something about the cause, and ability and motivation are affected by advertisements that include these persuasive strategies (Chandy et al., 2001). This study will explore the previous research on the effectiveness of persuasive strategies and produce original, applied research.

### Literature Review

Considerable research has been conducted regarding the content on different forms of advertisements, and researchers have drawn various conclusions about the effectiveness of the identified persuasive techniques. First, pathos will be examined. According to Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia (2008), the effectiveness of an advertisement depends on who is portrayed as the beneficiary from the donation.

Some advertisements highlight the person receiving the donation as the one who benefits while others show the personal advantages for the donor (Fisher et al., 2008). Life presents a social dilemma, in which an individual struggles in choosing to meet the interests of self or the interests of others (Das, Kerkhof, & Kuiper, 2008). When a donation is made, this actually helps the donor because he or she feels pride, happiness, and empowerment (Fisher et al., 2008). Although inevitably the donor will benefit from his or her contribution, it has been substantiated that advertisements highlighting the benefit the donor will receive are actually less effective because these advertisements make the naturally selfish motives of the donor obvious (Fisher et al., 2008). These appeals to other- versus self-benefit also depend on the valence of the advertisement's message (Fisher et al., 2008). There are three ways in which emotional appeals can affect the viewer's behavior. The first two approaches use the avoidance of negative feelings as persuasion (Fisher et al., 2008). First, aversive arousal reduction explains that "when we care about people, we experience distress when they are in need" (p. 521). We have two options: to either avoid the situation or to take care of the need, and in order to alleviate our own distress, we often take the latter route (Fisher et al., 2008). The empathy-specific punishment approach also says that "we are socialized to feel an obligation to help when someone we care about is in need", and we fear feeling guilty if we do not help (p. 521). The last approach, empathetic-joy, states that "the pursuit of a positive emotional state" motivates one to act (p. 522). This study showed that when other-benefit appeals were used, more calls to donate were received, and this effect increased when the other-benefit appeals were paired with the avoidance of negative feelings (Fisher et al., 2008). Therefore, we are more likely to help when we fear negative feelings as a result of inaction.

Similarly, Passyn and Sujana (2006) state that emotions that make the audience feel personally accountable will result in action. Emotions produce the intention to act, but the feeling of self-accountability is what moves the process from

intention to behavior. Certain emotions are accompanied by feelings of self-accountability, such as guilt, regret, and challenge. Guilt and regret are negative emotions felt when harming one's self or others. Challenge is a positive emotion, defined as "effortful optimism combined with the promise of success" (p. 584). All three of these emotions motivated action because high self-accountability emotions such as these spur one toward action, regardless of negativity or positivity (Passyn & Sujana, 2006). In this particular study, each of these emotions was combined with fear. The study concluded that "fear was necessary to gain attention and signal a problem while these accompanying emotions were necessary to direct a solution" (p. 588). In conclusion, this study learned that emotions that cause a person to feel accountable produce both the intention to act and the resulting behavioral changes.

Hibbert, Smith, Davies, and Ireland (2007) discussed the use of guilt as a persuasive tool and the audience's knowledge of this tool. Guilt is felt when one deviates from his or her own standards of what is right or when one feels better off or more fortunate than others (Hibbert et al., 2007). This study says that moderate levels of guilt are most productive, as too high of levels will produce irritation. When people feel guilty, they seek to reduce the negative emotion, which relates to their egoistic motives for helping discussed above. Consumers are often aware of guilt appeals. When participants in this study were skeptical of the tactics used, their guilt was lowered. Perceptions of manipulative content also lowered guilt, but surprisingly donations increased (Hibbert et al., 2007).

Das, Kerkhof, and Kuiper (2008) compared two types of evidence present in advertisements: narratives, which use pathos, and statistics, which use logos. It was shown that the use of anecdotes increases heuristic processing, in which the audience relies on peripheral, irrelevant cues to make sense of the information in a quick way rather than fully processing it (Das et al., 2008). The messages with anecdotal strategies generated the most positive feelings toward the message, and positively framed

anecdotes also increased the organization's relevance in the minds of the audience (Das et al., 2008). The use of statistics is most effective when the frame of the advertisement is negative, and anecdotes are most advantageous when the message is positively framed (Das et al., 2008). When using statistics, larger numbers in ratios increase the perceived seriousness of the issue. However, the same statistics presented with smaller ratios can make the goal appear more attainable. Therefore, when using statistics, larger numbers in ratios are more effective in negatively framed messages, but those with small numbers are more effective in positively framed messages when promoting charitable causes (Chang & Lee, 2010). The valence of the message affects the audience's overall perceptions of the cause.

Positive framing means presenting the good things that will happen as a result of donations while negative framing means telling the bad things will happen if a donation is not made (Chang & Lee, 2010). Negativity bias is one reason for using negative framing because people are more likely to remember and be affected by negative information (Chang & Lee, 2010). This study showed that negative framing was more effective than positive framing when promoting charitable causes (Chang & Lee, 2010). Hibbert and colleagues (2007) said that positive messages affect attitudes and beliefs, but negative messages impact behavior.

Another analysis of content showed the nature of the content, whether emotional or logical, affects donation behavior when it is directed toward a certain audience. Newer markets with less knowledge about products or services had a high motivation to find out information, so rational appeals were most effective (Chandy et al., 2001). These rational appeals included expert endorsers because this market was more dependent on the opinions of others to form their own. This market was also persuaded by arguments and text that stated the attributes of the product, service, or organization. Older markets that were aware of the features of the product had less motivation to pay attention to the advertisement; therefore, emotional

appeals were most effective at reaching this audience (Chandy et al., 2001).

Studies also show that the perception of the organization that is created by the advertisements affects the attitudes and behaviors of potential donors. This image of the organization will be referred to as their ethos, or credibility. O'Neill's (2008) study shows the importance of the organization's communication with the public. Certain practices proved to raise levels of trust, satisfaction, and commitment to an organization. The communication of the responsible use of funds proved to raise levels of all three. Communications that sparked the donor's interest raised levels of commitment, and communications that helped donors to understand the overall mission of the organization raised levels of trust (O'Neill, 2008). This article suggests that the relationship between the organization and the public is very important for maximizing donations. One practical way that an organization can develop satisfaction and commitment from donors is allowing them to control when they are solicited (O'Neill, 2008). Hibbert and colleagues (2007) also suggested that a consumer's agent knowledge, or knowledge of the organization, affected his or her behavior. The effectiveness and efficiency of the organization was an important factor, and if the organization was regarded as positive, feelings of guilt increased, and therefore, donations increased (Hibbert et al., 2007).

Social enterprise is a strategy being used recently by nonprofit organizations, according to Smith, Cronley, & Barr (2012). Social enterprise is defined as "the use of for-profit strategies by non-profit organizations" (p. 142). This strategy can affect the state of the organization in the eyes of the public. Mission consistency is a central element because if the social enterprise is mission-consistent, people will donate, but if it is inconsistent, they will not (Smith et al., 2012). There also must be perceptions of competence in the area of social enterprise because people want to see that there is a chance for success and that the organization is being a good steward of their resources (Smith et al., 2012). When an organization explicitly states their goals, their message

generates more positive attitudes and a higher intention to donate (Smith et al., 2012).

Another factor that has a role in charitable donations is the potential donors' knowledge of the behaviors of others. This can add to the organization's perceived credibility. In order to show that its goals are attainable, some organizations use the method of informing the potential donor about the donation behaviors of others (Shang, Reed, & Croson, 2008). People are more likely to donate when they are informed of other donors with a similar identity to theirs (Shang et al., 2008). This study suggests including fundraising letters to focus attention on other donors with a similar identity to the audience's (Shang et al., 2008). However, other studies presented various disadvantages to informing potential donors of other donors.

If the potential donor gets the impression that many others are already taking care of the problem, he or she may see no need to donate. This issue is compared with the story of the tragedy of the commons, where short-term behaviors that benefit the individual are detrimental to the long-term wellbeing of the collective (Das et al., 2008). Conversely, "a social fence exists when the short-term aversive consequences of an act keep us from performing this act, even though it would entail long-term benefits for the collective... A common feature of charity goals and social fence dilemmas is that they both depend on the goodwill of many contributors, not just a few, to solve a problem" (pp. 164-165).

The use of the social enterprise strategies discussed above also affects donor behaviors by informing potential donors of other available funds (Smith et al., 2012). The crowding out hypothesis states that when social enterprise tactics are used, funding from other sources such as donations will decrease because people think their donations are no longer needed (Smith et al., 2012). Overall, the introduction of social enterprise caused donations to decline. However, as stated earlier, the mission consistency and competency of these social enterprises can increase donations, and the revenue generated

from the social enterprise often makes up for revenue loss from other sources (Smith et al., 2012).

Throughout this literature review, it has been shown that all three of the persuasive strategies—pathos, logos, and ethos—are necessary for the persuasion of an audience. Many of these studies considered nonprofit organizations specifically and the ways that these strategies are used within their advertisements. People have a natural tendency to feel responsible for the wellbeing of others, and this means that they will respond more to appeals that make them feel personally accountable and that show the way their donation will benefit others. The appeal to pathos, which could take the form of a narrative, is most useful when the audience is familiar with the organization, as it causes their mind to take shortcuts instead of fully processing the information. The appeal to logos, which includes references to statistics, is most useful when the market is newer and unfamiliar with the work of the organization. The organization must also gain credibility, or ethos, by communicating with the public about its goals and practices as well as the attainability of these goals due to the participation of others, although this could be a Catch-22.

Although these studies produced an extensive knowledge base about the use of pathos, logos, and ethos, there is always more to be discovered. Different strategies may work better for specific organizations, and in the applied research I looked at Hats Off for Cancer and examined which persuasive strategies are most effective in the work of this particular organization. This study seeks to build on the knowledge gained through research. I seek to identify which of these advantageous practices Hats Off for Cancer is already using and which they can increase their use of.

### **Method**

In this quantitative study, surveys were distributed through the Hats Off for Cancer e-newsletter, the Hats Off for Cancer Facebook page, and my own Facebook network. The sample population included people who have already donated to Hats Off for Cancer as well as potential donors. The survey consisted of 14 questions about the potential donors' awareness and

involvement with Hats Off for Cancer. Participants were also shown three manufactured advertisements, in which one persuasive strategy, logos, pathos, or ethos, was used. The advertisement using logos was characterized by the use of logic, evidence, statistics, cause and effect, and compare and contrast arguments (see Figure 1). The advertisement using pathos used appeals to emotion, images, emotional language, and personal testimony (see Figure 2). The advertisement using ethos was operationalized by the use of celebrity or expert endorsements, education and experience of the message-sender, the pronouncement of an organizational mission and goals, and specific plans for funds (see Figure 3). The respondents' reactions to each advertisement were gauged through a series of

questions, both about the specific advertisements they viewed and hypothetical advertising situations. Participants were asked their reactions to the various messages as well as their likeliness to donate and their perceptions of the organization. Since some participants had already had contact with the organization through donation, they were asked where they learned of the organization and which persuasive techniques contributed to their decisions to donate. Their past behaviors and reasons for these behaviors were assessed. The three advertisements shown to the participants are as follows.

Figure 1

*Advertisement Employing Logos*

About 1,638,910 new cancer cases are expected to be diagnosed in 2012. In 2012, about 577,190 Americans are expected to die of cancer, more than 1,500 people a day.<sup>1</sup> By partnering with Hats Off for Cancer, *you* can do something to help those living with this disease.

Since its founding in 1996, Hats Off for Cancer has donated more than 1,500,000 brand new hats to hospitals, camps and individuals worldwide.

Last year, we raised nearly \$30,000 and donated more than 50,000 hats.

With your contribution, that number can increase!



It's easy to get involved!

- Host a Mad Hatter Drive during September, October, or November
  - Host a hat drive throughout the rest of the year
  - Purchase a Hats Off for Cancer t-shirt at <http://ata-clothing.com/products-page/apparel/gives/hats-off-for-cancer/>
  - Donate money on <http://hatsoffforcancer.org/donate/>
  - Tell your friends
  - Like the Hats Off for Cancer on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/HatsOffForCancerOrg>
- Ultimately, one of the goals of Hats Off for Cancer is that everyone who participates in or coordinates an event, realizes how easy it is to give back and uses this as a springboard to continue seeking out opportunities to give back to others in need.

<sup>1</sup> Facts retrieved from

<http://www.cancer.org/acs/groups/content/@epidemiologysurveillance/documents/document/acspc-031941.pdf>

Figure 2

*Advertisement Employing Pathos*

Hats Off for Cancer strives to bring awareness to childhood cancer while helping to make a childhood cancer patient's smile a bit brighter and their day a bit happier.

This is Johnathon Cahill. This little boy is an inspiration to many. A day after Mother's Day this year, his family saw a lump bulging from his stomach. After spending nearly a week in the hospital, doctors diagnosed him with a type of liver cancer called Hepatoblastoma. This type of cancer only affects one in 1.5 million children. The tumor covered 6/8th of Johnathon's liver. In August, doctor's resected Johnathon's liver. Since he also had two small tumors on his lung, he was considered a stage 4 cancer patient. He is currently undergoing chemotherapy, getting shots, and taking medications to beat cancer.

Johnathon's sister, Sarah, describes her baby brother as a kid that refuses to sit in bed all day:

*He gets right back up and plays with you. Even when the chemo makes him unable to walk, he will sit on the floor and play through the pain. Johnathon loves dancing and playing with cars and animals. He has a strong personality that shines right through...and is a strong little boy who was born a fighter. While he's in the hospital, he makes everyone smile. The nurses told us that Johnathon is the reason that they love their job! He's inspired me to become an Oncology nurse and graduate a year early.*

Sarah also says that some weeks are tougher than others. Recently, he started chemotherapy at Columbia in NYC for his last three week round. His family is incurring heavy medical costs, medication fees, as well as travel costs to get back and forth to the hospitals for Johnathon.

*Johnathon's name means "Gift from God" and he truly fits that meaning. Cancer won't bully Johnathon; he will win this battle!*

You can help Johnathon and his family! First, check out his Hope for Johnathon Facebook page set up by his sister, Sarah, and "Like" it. Then head over to the fundraising page set up for him and his family and donate whatever you can to help out this brave 2-year-old. Every little bit helps!

It's obvious by looking at this little boy that he can light up a room, but he is also an inspiration to us at Hats Off for Cancer, making it easy to name Johnathon our HOC Hero of the Week!

Figure 3

*Advertisement Employing Ethos*

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Est. 1996

“Hats Off for Cancer is one of the few great charities where we can all have a direct and tangible effect on the lives of others. In the most simplistic yet profound way we can give the gift of hope in a journey that sometimes breaks us, but with the outcome, that after words, we are stronger in the broken places.”

-Eric Christian Olsen (Actor, NCIS LA; Celebrity Spokesperson and Board Member, Hats Off For Cancer)



Hats Off for Cancer collects and donates hats to children who lose their hair due to cancer treatments.

As one of the leading and original hat programs, Hats Off for Cancer has donated more than 1,000,000 brand new hats to hospitals, camps, and individuals worldwide since 1996.

Hats Off for Cancer is recognized by the IRS as a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization.

Awards: Classy Awards finalist, Home Depot Home Town Hero, Jefferson Award, Prudential Spirit, Voices Charming Shoppe Grand Prize, Teen People Hero, Caring Award-Young Adult, L'Oreal Women of Worth finalist, Presidential Gold Award

## Results

The research found that 79% of respondents felt that the advertisement using pathos was most effective while 19% said logos and 2% said ethos.

The 79% of respondents who favored the pathos advertisement gave feedback such as, “it’s about the children that are receiving these gifts and the encouragement we’re providing”, “I like knowing what NPOs do for the people”, “it tugs on your heart’s strings”, “tells a story”, and “reminds me of my sister”.

The 19% of respondents who favored the logos advertisement cited reasons such as “...shows that the organization has been successful and will most likely continue to do so”, “...provided information about what they do, what your money is used for, and how to donate”, “...told me how my help is beneficial”, and “...straight to the point, facts were clearly stated”.

The 2% of respondents who favored the ethos advertisement said, “describes charity and its goal”, and “provides information to those who are just being introduced to the charity”.

## Discussion

Based on these results, three implications were drawn for Hats Off for Cancer that can also be applied to other nonprofit organizations. The first suggestion is that Hats Off for Cancer advertisements should provide information about what the organization does and how the public can get involved. According to Chandy, Tellis, MacInnis, and Thaivanich (2001), in order for the audience to take action, they must have both the ability and the motivation to act. This proved to be true in my research when respondents said that they preferred the logos approach for the reasons cited above.

The second implication for future Hats Off for Cancer communications is that they should inform donors specifically about what their money will be used for. One hundred percent of respondents to the survey answered that they would be more likely to donate if the organization specifically informed them of exactly where their money was going. This

finding correlates with information provided by O’Neil (2008) that states that when the responsible use of funds is communicated, levels of trust, satisfaction, and commitment to an organization increase.

Lastly, since the majority of respondents were deeply affected by the pathos advertisement, Hats Off for Cancer should use this approach in their advertisements in the future by using images of children. Because cancer is an emotional topic, although people are interested in the organization’s efforts they want to be most informed about the effects of their donations and the people who they are helping. According to Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia (2008), people are more likely to donate if an advertisement shows how their donation will benefit someone else. This finding was echoed in my study through the comments of participants.

## Limitations

Although this study yielded valuable information, I discovered some possible limitations and areas for future research. Because I was unable to garner participation from many past donors, many of the respondents to the survey had not previously donated. Therefore, this survey measured intended behaviors rather than actual behaviors.

Another limitation is that because my own Facebook network was invited to participate in the survey, and since I did not ask for demographic information, I suspect that the majority of the respondents were college students. This may have had a significant effect on the data.

Therefore, in order to combat these two possible points of error in the future, research should be done on actual behaviors by asking only previous donors why they donated. It is also important to ask for demographic information in order to identify patterns within the data.

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## Hashtag Politics: The Polyphonic Revolution of #Twitter

By Bud Davis

Traditional door-to-door, hand-out-flyers-on-the-curb campaigning faces a burgeoning threat. Democrats and Republicans alike are at the cusp of a revolution in political strategizing. Lengthy, flowery speeches compete with messages only 140 characters long, and political analysts' televised monologues compete with online dialogues between everyday people. Twitter has reshaped American culture and thrust the political machine into the blogosphere of social media. There have been several attempts to adapt to this new medium, such as President Obama's first ever "Twitter Town Hall" in 2011 (Shear, 2011). And with the number of accounts increasing each day, the appeal of tapping into this communication tool is greater than ever.

Twitter proves to be massively popular for both informal communication and decisive political strategizing. Specifically, the 2008 presidential campaign demonstrated how Twitter could be tactfully employed to target key constituencies, develop an attractive online impression, and remain connected to millions of supporters and potential voters. This paper seeks to trace the evolution of Twitter as a political resource and determine what influence it has in disseminating talking points, weighing platforms, and maintaining mass communication. Ultimately, I argue that Twitter's unique intertextuality contains the potential for spurring widespread political activism by