

## DOCTORAL THESIS

# Do emotional appeals always work in fund-raising efforts?: an explanation of schema congruity theory and emotion regulation on nonprofit and for-profit fund raising

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## **ABSTRACT**

Across three experiments, I demonstrate that when for-profit organizations focus on the emotional aspects of fund-raising appeals, the evaluations of their appeal decline and they are unsuccessful in generating positive donation intentions; however, this is not the case for nonprofit organizations. In particular, experiment 1 reveals that affective, emotional appeals are viewed more favorably by consumers when they are connected with nonprofit organizations; in contrast, rational, unemotional appeals have greater favorability when they are associated with for-profit organizations. This interaction effect is mediated by the processing fluency, in which the nonprofit organization concepts (vs. for-profit concepts) are congruent with the emotional dimensions of the fund-raising content, causing an ease of processing and positive appeal evaluations. In experiment 2, I find converging evidence that people tend to place little weight on their actual emotional responses in making donation decisions when a for-profit organization is involved. Consumers tend to exhibit a donation flatline, displaying equivalent donation behavior regardless of the actual emotional experiences involved. In experiment 3, I further demonstrate that people's memory performance actually becomes impaired when a high-intensity negative emotional appeal is presented by a for-profit organization but not when it is presented by a nonprofit organization, which again reveals that for-profit organizations' use of emotional appeals to connect with consumers' affective feelings may backfire. I argue that this is because the activation of for-profit concepts (vs. nonprofit concepts) gives rise to the cognitive system (vs. the affective system), leading people to regulate their emotions via suppression in order to conduct a careful assessment of the appeal content; this results in a donation flatline.

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