

Fundraiser Magic: The Impact of Personalized Solicitation on Online Donation Campaigns

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Abstract

Online donations are an important revenue stream for non-profits. This study investigates the impact of using fundraisers who actively solicit donations through personalized virtual outreach in online campaigns. Analyzing data from a leading online donation platform, Click&Pledge, we find that incorporating fundraisers significantly enhances campaign performances through total amounts raised, unique donors acquired, and sustained donation frequency. Surprisingly, online donors did not exhibit significant "ask avoidance" behaviors in response to solicitation, contrary to offline tendencies. Fundraiser involvement in preceding campaigns was associated with positive reinforcement effects increasing subsequent donor participation. The study offers actionable insights for non-profits on leveraging the virtual "ask" through peer fundraising to improve outcomes. It extends theoretical understanding around charitable solicitation and avoidance dynamics from offline to online contexts. Our empirical evidence highlights the crucial role fundraisers play in enhancing the effectiveness of online donation campaigns.

Keywords: online donations, fundraisers, solicitation, ask avoidance, nonprofit fundraising.

1. Introduction

Online donations have emerged as a popular and increasingly important method for individuals to support causes and organizations that align with their values and beliefs. In 2023, Americans donated a total of \$471.44 billion to charities, with online giving growing by 9% and representing 11.9% of total funds raised by non-profits (Giving USA, 2023). Online donation platforms offer convenience, security, accessibility, and global reach by removing

geographic and time barriers (Burtch et al., 2013). These platforms often provide a streamlined, user-friendly interface that allows individuals to make contributions quickly and securely from anywhere in the world. In addition, they offer a range of features that enhance the donation process, such as customizable campaign pages, integrated payment systems, real-time tracking of fundraising progress, and social sharing tools that enable users to promote campaigns across various social media channels. Some charities report that up to 30% of their annual contributions now come from online sources.

Online donation settings are unique in several ways that distinguish them from traditional fundraising environments. Unlike offline donation settings, where physical presence and personal interactions often play a crucial role in encouraging donations, online platforms rely heavily on digital communication and virtual engagement to foster connections between donors and causes. This shift introduces both opportunities and challenges for fundraisers. The convenience and global reach of online platforms allow donors to contribute from anywhere in the world at any time, making it easier for non-profits to reach a broader audience. In addition, the ability to quickly share campaigns through social media and email improves the visibility of fundraising efforts, which potentially increases the pool of prospective donors.

However, running successful online donation campaigns presents unique challenges. Traditional offline campaigns often utilize solicitation tactics like door-to-door requests to create social pressure, which can significantly increase donation likelihood and amounts (Meer, 2011). In the online environment, donation platforms provide a function to include "fundraisers"—individuals who actively solicit donations for a campaign through methods such as email, social media promotion, and virtual peer-to-peer asks. These fundraisers are typically volunteers or

supporters who commit to promoting the non-profit's cause through their personal and professional networks. They sometimes create individual fundraising pages linked to the main campaign, where they can share personalized messages, stories, and updates to inspire donations. They help spread the word, increase visibility, and potentially drive contributions. However, little guidance exists on the effects of leveraging these online fundraiser roles to replicate the "power of the ask" in an online setting.

There is a rich literature on the motivations and factors influencing charitable giving, but mixed findings on the efficacy of solicitation—whether people are more likely to give when directly asked versus trying to avoid being solicited due to feelings of guilt or aversion to social pressure (Andreoni & Payne, 2013). Incorporating fundraisers in online campaigns could potentially boost donations by overcoming ask avoidance, as personalized virtual outreach may counteract feelings of anonymity online. However, fundraiser solicitation could backfire if donors perceive it as intrusive or unwelcome in an online context (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011).

Understanding the role of fundraisers and potential *ask avoidance* behaviors in online donation campaigns is critically important for several reasons. First, online giving has become a major revenue stream for many non-profits, so optimizing these strategies is vital for ensuring organizations can raise funds to support their causes. Even small improvements could translate to millions in additional funding (Sargeant & Shang, 2011). Second, there is a lack of research into how solicitation and avoidance behaviors manifest in online contexts versus traditional environments. Third, online platforms provide a unique lens to extend and reassess behavioral theories around charitable giving at an unprecedented scale. Finally, an evidence-based understanding can help donation platforms develop better tools and interfaces to maximize impact (Hou et al., 2021).

This study aims to understand the power of the ask and ask avoidance in the context of online donations by empirically examining the impact of using fundraisers in campaigns on a leading platform. Specifically, we investigate 1) the effect of having fundraisers in an online donation campaign on fundraising performance, and 2) whether ask avoidance tendencies exist online, affecting subsequent campaign performance when fundraisers are utilized.

Using a unique dataset provided by a leading online donation platform, our results reveal that incorporating fundraisers into online donation campaigns significantly improves key performance

metrics. Campaigns with fundraisers raised higher total donation amounts, attracted more unique donors, and saw increased donation frequency. Importantly, we found no significant evidence of *ask avoidance* behaviors in response to fundraiser solicitations in the online context. Instead, using fundraisers in a preceding campaign positively influenced the performance of subsequent campaigns, suggesting that virtual solicitation does not generate the same avoidance behaviors seen in offline environments.

Our study offers important theoretical and practical insights by extending ask avoidance theory to online donations and providing empirical evidence on how individuals respond to virtual solicitation requests. By investigating these under-studied dynamics through a novel dataset and theoretical lenses, this research makes several critical contributions to the literature on charitable behavior. First, it challenges existing assumptions about ask avoidance behaviors in online contexts, showing that fundraisers' virtual asks do not lead to significant avoidance, which is contrary to tendencies observed in traditional offline environments. This finding broadens our understanding of donor behavior and suggests that online donors may experience solicitation differently due to the virtual and often anonymous nature of online platforms.

Second, our analysis reveals that incorporating fundraisers in online campaigns significantly improves key performance metrics, including total donation amounts, the number of unique donors, and donation frequency. This emphasizes the effectiveness of personalized outreach in the digital realm and provides actionable insights for non-profits on leveraging peer-driven solicitation strategies to maximize fundraising outcomes.

Third, this study highlights the positive reinforcement effects observed when fundraisers are used in preceding campaigns, suggesting that such strategies can enhance donor participation in subsequent campaigns. This finding offers practical guidance for non-profits and online platforms on sustaining and building donor engagement over time through strategic use of fundraiser involvement.

Overall, our research contributes to the theoretical understanding of charitable solicitation and avoidance dynamics. It extends these important concepts from offline to online environments. In addition, our findings provide valuable insights to help non-profits, donors, and platforms enhance the power of online giving, ultimately supporting more effective and impactful fundraising efforts.

2. Research Background

A core area of focus in the charitable giving literature has been understanding the psychological phenomena of “the power of the ask” and the opposing “ask avoidance” behaviors exhibited by potential donors. The power of the ask refers to the well-established finding that people are significantly more likely to make a charitable donation and to give larger amounts when they are directly solicited compared to making an autonomous decision to give (Lacetera et al. 2011; Landry et al. 2006). Many studies across various contexts from door-to-door campaigns to public fundraising drives have demonstrated the effectiveness of solicitation in boosting donation compliance and generosity (e.g., Andreoni et al., 2017; Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Lacetera et al., 2011; Landry et al., 2006; Meer, 2011).

The power of the ask is theorized to arise from the psychological discomfort induced by rejecting a solicitation request. People experience desires to maintain positive self/social perceptions, avoid feelings of guilt or embarrassment, and conform to societal norms around generosity (Meer 2011). Being directly asked creates an implicit social pressure that makes it unpleasant to turn down the request, compelling people to donate.

However, the discomfort associated with solicitation can trigger “ask avoidance” behaviors, where potential donors take proactive steps to avoid being solicited for charitable contributions. Common ask avoidance strategies include declining to answer the door for solicitors, avoiding events where solicitors may be present, and adjusting routines to minimize exposure to donation requests.

By circumventing solicitation attempts entirely, donors are able to sidestep an unpleasant decision-making process that carries psychological costs like guilt. The ask avoidance is driven by competing motivations – people’s altruistic leanings conflict with an aversion to the social pressures and negative emotions that solicitation can induce (Ariely et al. 2009).

While highly effective in traditional face-to-face fundraising contexts, the dynamics of making a donation request and avoiding it in online environments – facilitated by online platforms, email, and social media – pose many open questions. On one hand, the virtual nature and perceived anonymity of online spaces may reduce psychological pressures, thereby diminishing the effectiveness of solicitation and potentially diminishing the power of the ask. On the other hand, personalized peer-to-peer online requests could increase social incentives and discomfort around rejecting asks, amplifying

solicitation’s impact.

Similarly, the ability to easily exit online campaigns or block future solicitations could exacerbate ask avoidance behaviors by online donors. The psychological distance provided by virtual interactions may minimize avoidance motivations. Furthermore, online donors may simply have different motivations and sensitivities when it comes to solicitation compared to traditional donors, altering the power of the ask and avoidance effects (Li 2017; Hou et al. 2021).

By examining the strategies of online donation platforms incorporating peer-driven solicitation through “fundraisers” and analyzing donors’ responses in a large dataset, this study can provide critical real-world insights into the effects of the ask. It extends the understanding of whether and how ask avoidance and the power of the ask operate in digital contexts and refines the literature on charitable behaviors.

3. Hypotheses Development

Studies across various contexts have demonstrated that being directly asked to give to a charitable cause increases compliance and donation amounts (Lacetera et al. 2011; Landry et al. 2006). The power of the ask creates social pressure that makes people more likely to give than if left to make an autonomous decision (Andreoni et al. 2017). By incorporating fundraisers who personally reach out to potential donors, online campaigns may be able to replicate some level of the social pressure and solicitation effects found in traditional door-to-door or in-person fundraising drives. In addition, personalized virtual outreach from fundraisers could counteract the feelings of anonymity and detachment that can arise in online settings (Meer 2011). Given that online platforms enhance depersonalization, having fundraisers can personalize the interactions manifesting in positive donation outcomes. Depersonalization theory posits that individuals experience a sense of detachment from their own identity, thoughts, emotions, or reality, often perceiving themselves and others in a more abstract and impersonal manner (Sierra et al. 2004; Sierra and Berrios 2001). Having a known connection to ask for a donation introduces both social incentives to comply to uphold one’s reputation and image, as well as psychological motivators like avoiding feelings of guilt or embarrassment from rejecting the request (Andreoni et al. 2017). Fundraisers may make the solicitation feel more personal and salient.

However, the virtual nature of online solicitation could diminish the power of the ask compared to in-

person settings. Without the physical presence and non-verbal cues, donors may be more willing to simply ignore or avoid the solicitation. Some may even perceive personalized digital outreach from fundraisers as intrusive or inappropriate in the online context, generating avoidance rather than increasing giving (Ariely et al. 2009).

Furthermore, donors contributing through online platforms likely have different motivations and mindsets compared to those giving through traditional means. They can be more likely driven by internal motivations than external social pressure (Li 2017; Hou et al. 2021). Thus, fundraiser solicitation may not carry the same impact online, potentially even backfiring and reducing donations from those who prefer anonymity and autonomy in their giving decisions.

Based on these contrasting arguments, it is not clear how potential online donors may respond to the ask from an online fundraiser. Therefore, we develop our first set of competing hypotheses concerning the impact of fundraisers on overall online fundraising campaign performance:

H1a: The presence of fundraisers actively soliciting donations in an online campaign will increase campaign performance.

H1b: The presence of fundraisers actively soliciting donations in an online campaign will decrease campaign performance.

In addition, prior research has found that when given the opportunity, a significant number of potential donors will take steps to avoid being directly solicited for charitable contributions. This is theorized to arise from competing motivations – people’s propensity for altruistic behavior clashes with their aversion to the feelings of guilt, embarrassment, and social pressure that come from rejecting solicitation requests (Ariely et al. 2009). By proactively avoiding solicitation situations, donors can evade the associated psychological discomfort.

In the online context, ask avoidance behaviors could manifest in donors exiting campaigns prematurely or opting out of future campaigns from the same organization to avoid further solicitation attempts. Such ask avoidance tendency could be particularly evident among donors who are intrinsically motivated to give based on their personal values and desires, rather than external social influences (Hou et al. 2021; Li 2017).

In contrast, the psychological pressure and discomfort induced by online fundraiser solicitation may be diminished compared to traditional in-person requests. The virtual buffer and ease of ignoring digital outreach could minimize ask avoidance motivations.

If a significant portion of online donors exhibit

ask avoidance in response to fundraiser solicitation, it could negatively impact both immediate and future donation performance, as campaigns and organizations might lose segments of their donor base. However, if online donors do not exhibit such tendencies, it would indicate important differences from traditional contexts.

Therefore, based on these differing perspectives, our second set of competing hypotheses examines the degree to which online donors may exhibit ask avoidance tendencies:

H2a: The presence of fundraisers actively soliciting donations will lead to higher ask avoidance behaviors, negatively impacting subsequent campaign performance.

H2b: Online donors will not exhibit significant ask avoidance tendencies regardless of the presence of fundraisers soliciting donations.

These hypotheses provide a framework to investigate key outcomes related to the use of fundraisers in online donation campaigns based on contrasting arguments, which contributes to the growing literature on online charitable behaviors.

4. Empirical Analysis

4.1 Data

We work closely with the founder and CEO of Click&Pledge (C&P), a leading online donation platform in the U.S. specializing in supporting non-profit organizations with their fundraising campaigns. C&P offers a robust and comprehensive platform that enables non-profit organizations to create and manage tailored online donation campaigns that meet their needs. In addition, an organization is offered with an option to include fundraisers in their campaign or not at no additional cost to them. Figure 1 provides one example of a campaign page created by an organization on the platform. In the bottom right corner, it shows that an organization can include fundraisers for the campaign. In addition, individuals can sign up to become fundraisers by clicking the “Fundraise for us” button on this page. These features can be customized by organizations using the platform’s various functions.

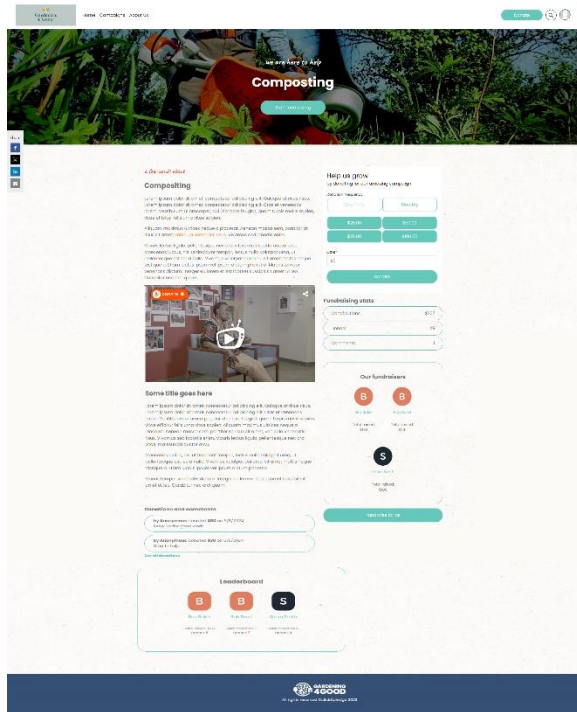


Figure 1. Example of a campaign page

Our unique dataset¹ includes all campaigns and donations on the platform since 2014, filtered to include only those campaigns with a valid start and end date prior to January 1, 2023. This ensures that the campaigns included in the dataset are completed and ready for analysis. We included only donations made within the campaign's start and end dates to ensure a fair evaluation across different campaigns.

Our final dataset includes 1,075 organizations, 5,471 campaigns, 456,367 transactions, and a total donation amount of \$66,739,222. On average, each organization has completed 5.1 campaigns, received 424.5 donations, and raised \$62,083 during our data collection period. In addition, we collected information on whether each donation was associated with a fundraiser. Our dataset includes a unique identifier for each fundraiser, which enables us to calculate each fundraiser's contribution to a campaign. Notably, only 474 campaigns, or about 9% of the campaigns, utilized fundraisers.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the number of organizations by the total donation amount they have raised. Our dataset includes both small and large organizations, ranging from those that have raised a few thousand dollars to those that have raised over \$1

million on the platform. Note that the median total donation amount across all organizations is \$114,655, which suggests that most organizations are small to medium-sized, with total donations of around \$100,000.

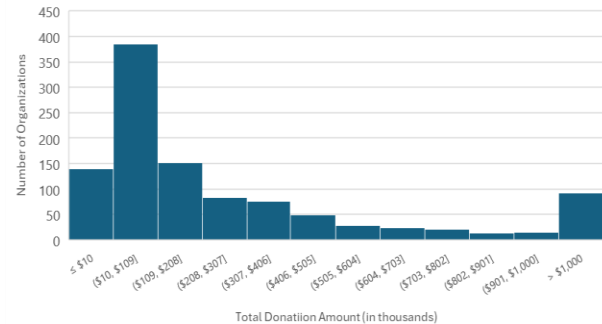


Figure 2. Distribution of total donation amount raised by organizations

4.2 Dependent Variables

To test the impact of fundraisers on campaign performance, we develop three measures of campaign performance from different perspectives. First, we define *TotalDonationAmount* as the total dollar amount for each campaign to measure the overall funds raised for a campaign. Second, *NumberOfDonors* is the number of unique donors in each campaign which measures the reach of the campaign. Third, the *DonationsFrequency* is the total number of transactions over the time period of a campaign, which measures a campaign's capability of continuously attracting donations throughout the campaign duration. We use the natural log transform of these three variables to offer a balanced scale of the variables and account for the potential nonlinear nature of the effects. These three variables together capture the success of fundraising, the scope of a campaign, and the stamina of a campaign. Table 1 shows a summary of the statistics of the variables.

¹ The dataset is completely anonymized with no personally and organizationally identifiable information and is in full compliance with the data privacy statement of the company (C&P).

Table 1: Summary of statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
<i>UseFundraiser</i>	5471	.087	.281	0	1
<i>NumberOfFundraisers</i>	5471	.742	4.547	0	121
<i>HasTarget</i>	5471	.371	.483	0	1
<i>CampaignDuration</i>	5471	4.643	1.223	0	8
<i>OrgHistory</i>	5471	7.666	.517	5	8
<i>OrgExperience</i>	5471	49.128	64.859	1	290
<i>OrgPastDonationAmount</i>	5471	12.472	1.681	1	18
<i>OrgPastDonationNumber</i>	5471	7.504	1.642	1	13
<i>OrgPastCampaignTarget</i>	5471	7.138	4.181	0	22

4.3 Independent Variables

To test the effects of fundraisers, we focused on two key variables of interest. First, we defined *UseFundraiser* as a dummy variable, which takes the value 1 if a campaign uses at least one fundraiser and 0 otherwise. This variable compares campaigns that use fundraisers against those that do not, directly measuring the effect of using fundraisers on a campaign’s performance. By including this variable, we can determine if the mere presence of fundraisers in a campaign correlates with higher total donation amounts, a greater number of donors, and increased donation frequency.

Second, we measured the effects of having more fundraisers on campaign performance by using *NumberOfFundraisers*, which is the number of *unique* fundraisers in each campaign. Since the majority of the campaigns do not utilize fundraisers, the average of *NumberOfFundraisers* is only 0.742. However, among those that use fundraisers, the average is 8.565. This variable allows us to assess whether the involvement of multiple fundraisers in a campaign has a positive effect on the campaign’s success metrics. A higher number of fundraisers could potentially lead to increased outreach, diversified donor bases, and more frequent donation solicitations, which could enhance overall campaign performance. This variable examines the impact of having more fundraisers on campaign outcomes, hypothesizing that broader network effects and increased solicitation efforts will lead to better results.

4.4 Control Variables

To account for other factors that could affect campaign performance, we include two sets of control variables. The first set controls the campaign level effects and the second set controls the organization level effects. For campaign level effects, we include *HasTarget*, which is a dummy variable that is 1 if a

campaign sets a target amount and 0 otherwise. We also include *CampaignDuration*, which accounts for the impact of the length of a campaign. A longer campaign may allow more time for potential donors to donate and thus may raise a higher donation amount or have more donors as a result. For organization level effects, we consider the history of an organization on the platform, *OrgHistory*, which is the natural log of the number of days to date since the organization joined the platform. *Org Experience* considers the level of experience an organization has in managing fundraising campaigns, which we define as the number of campaigns the organization has developed to date. To account for an organization’s past success in raising funds, we include *OrgPastDonationAmount* and *OrgPastDonationNumber*, which are the natural log of the total dollar amount of donations and the total number of donations an organization has raised to date. Lastly, we control the average target amount of the campaigns an organization has to date, using *OrgPastCampaignTarget*. This helps to control an organization’s usual expectations of campaign performance.

5. Results

We construct a panel dataset of organization and campaign pairs to analyze the impact of utilizing fundraisers who solicit donations on campaign performance metrics. First, we examine whether simply incorporating fundraisers enhances fundraising outcomes. Table 2 reports the estimation results from regression models with *TotalDonationAmount*, *NumberOfDonors*, and *DonationFrequency* as respective dependent variables. Interestingly, we find significant and positive effects of *UseFundraiser* across all three performance measures. These results provide strong evidence that incorporating fundraisers in online campaigns substantially improves online fundraising performance, even after controlling for campaign characteristics and organization factors. The virtual outreach appears to effectively leverage the “power of the ask” witnessed in traditional environments.

Table 2: Effects of using fundraisers

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Total Donation Amount	Number of Donors	Donation Frequency
<i>UseFundraiser</i>	.951*** (.137)	1.072*** (.098)	.298*** (.045)
<i>HasTarget</i>	.049 (.095)	.027 (.06)	.037* (.02)
<i>CampaignDuration</i>	.258*** (.034)	.138*** (.018)	-.166*** (.008)
<i>OrgHistory</i>	-.134 (.086)	.036 (.053)	-.06** (.025)
<i>OrgExperience</i>	-.013*** (.002)	-.008*** (.001)	-.004*** (.001)
<i>OrgPastDonationAmount</i>	.508*** (.05)	.013 (.029)	-.012 (.013)
<i>OrgPastDonationNumber</i>	-.101* (.059)	.242*** (.034)	.142*** (.02)
<i>OrgPastCampaignTarget</i>	-.004 (.012)	-.007 (.007)	-.003 (.003)
Observations	5471	5471	5471
R ²	.031	.063	.195

Robust standard errors are in parentheses.
*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

To further investigate the effect of using fundraisers on campaign performance, we investigate whether increasing the number of fundraisers can provide an additive boost. As shown in Table 3, the estimated coefficients for *NumberOfFundraisers* are positive and significant for all three models. The results indicate an incremental benefit from adding more fundraisers.

Together, these findings support H1a that using fundraisers increases an online campaign's performance. And H1b is not supported.

Table 3: Effects of number of fundraisers

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Total Donation Amount	Number of Donors	Donation Frequency
<i>NumberOfFundraisers</i>	.685*** (.061)	.714*** (.038)	.212*** (.029)
<i>HasTarget</i>	-.001 (.095)	-.014 (.06)	.021 (.02)
<i>CampaignDuration</i>	.253*** (.034)	.133*** (.018)	-.168*** (.008)
<i>OrgHistory</i>	-.126 (.085)	.042 (.052)	-.058** (.025)
<i>OrgExperience</i>	-.013*** (.002)	-.007*** (.001)	-.004*** (.001)
<i>OrgPastDonationAmount</i>	.519*** (.05)	.022 (.028)	-.009 (.012)
<i>OrgPastDonationNumber</i>	-.124** (.058)	.221*** (.034)	.135*** (.019)
<i>OrgPastCampaignTarget</i>	-.005 (.012)	-.008 (.007)	-.003 (.003)
Observations	5471	5471	5471
R ²	.043	.092	.218

Robust standard errors are in parentheses.
*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

One phenomenon observed in traditional offline donation environments is *ask avoidance*, where potential donors may avoid participating in future campaigns or donating to certain organizations after being actively solicited by fundraisers. Our previous analysis provided strong evidence that incorporating fundraisers who solicit donations improves performance in online campaigns by increasing total funds raised, unique donor counts, and donation frequency. However, we are also interested in understanding whether similar ask avoidance behaviors exist in response to an organization's use of fundraisers in their prior online donation campaigns.

Specifically, we examined whether having fundraisers involved in an organization's preceding campaign impacted the performance of their current campaign. To investigate the effect of using fundraisers on subsequent campaign performance, we use variables capturing the fundraiser effects from an organization's last campaign, including whether they used fundraisers and the number of fundraisers involved. The results are reported in Table 4.

Table 4: Effects of having fundraisers on subsequent campaign

	(1) Total Donation Amount	(2) Number of Donors	(3) of Donation Frequency	(4) Total Donation Amount	(5) Number of Donors	(6) of Donation Frequency
<i>UseFundraiser_{t-1}</i>	.245 (.151)	.189* (.103)	.076* (.04)			
<i>NumberOfFundraisers_{t-1}</i>				.156** (.065)	.13*** (.044)	.032 (.022)
<i>HasTarget</i>	.051 (.108)	.04 (.069)	.021 (.022)	.057 (.108)	.045 (.069)	.023 (.022)
<i>CampaignDuration</i>	.261*** (.039)	.137*** (.021)	-.163*** (.009)	.261*** (.039)	.137*** (.021)	-.163*** (.009)
<i>OrgHistory</i>	-.169 (.107)	.054 (.067)	-.021 (.031)	-.168 (.108)	.055 (.067)	-.021 (.031)
<i>OrgExperience</i>	-.011*** (.002)	-.007*** (.001)	-.004*** (.001)	-.011*** (.002)	-.007*** (.001)	-.004*** (.001)
<i>OrgPastDonationAmount</i>	.534*** (.063)	-.001 (.038)	.012 (.018)	.536*** (.063)	.001 (.038)	.012 (.018)
<i>OrgPastDonationNumber</i>	-.165** (.066)	.25*** (.042)	.127*** (.021)	-.17** (.066)	.247*** (.042)	.126*** (.021)
<i>OrgPastCampaignTarget</i>	.01 (.015)	-.005 (.009)	.001 (.003)	.009 (.014)	-.006 (.009)	.001 (.003)
<i>UseFundraiser</i>	1.056*** (.147)	1.167*** (.115)	.314*** (.054)	1.04*** (.149)	1.15*** (.117)	.313*** (.054)
Observations	4396	4396	4396	4396	4396	4396
R ²	.035	.068	.193	.034	.068	.192

Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$

Surprisingly, the results revealed no evidence of significant ask avoidance behaviors from donors in response to an organization's fundraiser usage in their prior campaign. Our analysis indicates some significantly positive effects on the performance of an organization's current campaign when they utilized fundraisers during their most recent preceding campaign. Using fundraisers in the preceding campaign is positively associated with acquiring more donors and increasing donation frequency for the current campaign (Models 2 and 3 in Table 4). In addition, having more fundraisers in the preceding campaign positively affects the total donation amount raised and the number of donors acquired in the current campaign (Model 4 and 5 in Table 4).

These findings suggest that rather than generating ask avoidance behaviors from donors, having fundraisers solicit donations in an organization's preceding online campaign either has no significant negative impact on donor behavior in their subsequent campaign or can potentially have a positive effect in encouraging higher participation levels. Interestingly, we did not find any evidence that donors avoid participating or making contributions to an organization's subsequent online campaign as a result of being solicited by fundraisers during that organization's most recent prior campaign, which is a behavior commonly observed in traditional offline environments. This could indicate key differences in how online donors perceive and respond to solicitation through virtual peer-to-peer channels compared to in-person requests. As a result, we find evidence supporting H2b but not H2a.

Overall, these results suggest that nonprofits and

online giving platforms need not be overly concerned about ask avoidance tendencies arising from their incorporation of active fundraiser solicitation in online donation campaigns. In fact, utilizing fundraisers may provide positive reinforcement effects that organizations can potentially leverage to enhance donor participation in their subsequent fundraising efforts following campaigns involving fundraiser outreach.

6. Robustness Check

To check the robustness of our results, we conducted a Propensity Score Matching (PSM) analysis. This method helps to address potential selection bias and ensures that the differences in outcomes can be more confidently attributed to the treatment effect, in this case, the use of fundraisers in online donation campaigns. In our analysis, we matched campaigns that used fundraisers with those that did not, based on several key covariates that could influence campaign performance. Due to page limitations, the detailed results of the PSM analysis are not included in this paper. However, it is important to note that the findings from the PSM analysis are consistent with our main results.

7. Discussions and Conclusions

Our study provides new insights into the dynamics of online donation campaigns, particularly focusing on the role of fundraisers. By analyzing a comprehensive dataset from C&P, we observed that

the inclusion of fundraisers in online campaigns significantly enhances campaign performance. Specifically, campaigns that utilized fundraisers showed higher total donation amounts, a greater number of unique donors, and increased donation frequency compared to those that did not.

One notable finding from our analysis is the absence of significant ask avoidance behaviors in the online environment. Unlike traditional offline donation settings, where potential donors often avoid future campaigns or organizations after being solicited, our results suggest that online donors do not exhibit similar avoidance tendencies. Instead, the involvement of fundraisers in a preceding campaign positively influenced the performance of subsequent campaigns. This indicates that online donors may perceive and respond to solicitation differently, possibly due to the less intrusive nature of virtual peer-to-peer requests compared to in-person solicitations.

The positive effects observed in our study can be attributed to several factors. First, the convenience and anonymity of online platforms may reduce the psychological discomfort associated with rejecting donation requests. Second, the use of fundraisers likely enhances the reach and visibility of campaigns, attracting a broader and more diverse donor base. Third, fundraisers may bring in additional social proof and credibility, which can further motivate potential donors to contribute. Finally, fundraisers may enhance the personalization of a depersonalized online donation environment and make it easier for donors to donate.

Our findings have significant implications for nonprofit organizations and online donation platforms. The evidence suggests that incorporating fundraisers into online campaigns not only boosts immediate fundraising outcomes but also fosters a positive donor experience that can enhance future campaign performance. Nonprofits should consider leveraging the power of fundraisers to maximize their online fundraising efforts. Furthermore, online platforms can support this by providing tools and features that facilitate the effective management and engagement of fundraisers. Particularly, given the low participation in using fundraisers among organizations (e.g., only 9% of campaigns on this platform utilize them), our results indicate a significant opportunity for these organizations to enhance their fundraising performance. By incorporating more fundraisers into their future campaigns, organizations can leverage the demonstrated benefits of personalized solicitation to achieve better outcomes. This can have implications for developing platform features that can enhance online donation performance, such as an AI-driven IntelliGive tool that can mimic a human fundraiser using a ChatGPT type interface with the donors.

In conclusion, this study explored the impact of fundraisers on the performance of online donation campaigns, addressing both immediate and subsequent campaign outcomes. Our analysis shows that using fundraisers significantly improves key performance metrics such as total donation amount, number of unique donors, and donation frequency. Contrary to traditional offline settings, we find no evidence of ask avoidance behavior in response to fundraiser solicitations in the online environment.

The results highlight the potential of fundraisers to enhance the effectiveness of online donation campaigns. Nonprofit organizations and online giving platforms can benefit from actively incorporating fundraisers into their strategies to capitalize on the positive reinforcement effects. By understanding the unique dynamics of online donor behavior, nonprofits can optimize their fundraising approaches to achieve better outcomes and foster sustained donor engagement.

Our study contributes to the literature on charitable giving by extending the understanding of ask avoidance and fundraiser effectiveness to the online context. It offers practical insights for nonprofits looking to improve their fundraising performance in the digital age, where what we learn can guide developing AI-driven decision tools as part of the platforms. Future research can build on these findings by exploring the long-term effects of fundraiser involvement and examining other factors that influence donor behavior in online donation platforms.

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