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When public recognition inhibits prosocial behavior:

The case of charitable giving

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Abstract

Commonly regarded as an important driver of donation behavior, public recognition also can reduce donations. With three studies, this research manipulates whether donors receive public, private, imposed, or optional forms of recognition; the results show that the influence of recognition on the decision to donate is moderated by donors' need for social approval. Whereas public recognition improves charitable giving among people with higher need for approval, imposing recognition reduces donations among people with lower need, suggesting a potential crowding out effect on prior motives (Study 1). This penalty for public recognition disappears when the public recognition is optional (Study 2). When public recognition is saliently imposed (not requested), donation likelihood increases, suggesting that donors' potential concerns about observers' suspicion of their true motives is reduced (Study 3). This research highlights conditions in which public recognition encourages charitable giving, and paves the way for further research on social dimensions of generosity.

Introduction

Traditional conceptualizations of charitable giving presented it as an intrinsically motivated behavior (Polonsky, Shelley, & Voola, 2002), but more recent considerations highlight a positive influence of public recognition on generosity (Bekkers & Schuyt, 2008; Smith & McSweeney, 2007). Although modesty about good behaviors is socially encouraged, a successful demonstration of generosity can have positive returns for the person's reputation (Berman, Levine, Barasch, & Small, 2015). Therefore, public recognition may offer an important motivation to engage in prosocial behavior, and charitable organizations increasingly use public recognition tactics to encourage donors' generosity (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2010). However, there is no confirmation that social incentives always positively affect generosity, and some recent research even suggests contrasting effects (Simpson, White, & Laran, 2017).

Because charitable behaviors are socially encouraged, charitable giving is likely to grant a donor social approval. To the extent the potential donor values social approval, public recognition will have a positive impact on his or her decision to donate, even if he or she is also intrinsically motivated. However, public demonstrations of generosity can "create doubt about the extent to which they are performed for the incentives" (Bénabou & Tirole, 2006, p. 1654). Observers might infer that the donor is not intrinsically motivated at all but strategically engages in a generous act merely to gain praise (Crisp & Turner, 2014). In that case, if a donor is motivated by intrinsic factors such as guilt or personal values, public forms of recognition even could crowd out the initial benefits of the behavior (Simpson et al, 2017).

For charitable organizations, this ambiguity creates a decision problem, especially with the increasing use of social media (Bhati & McDonnell, 2020; Chapman, Masser & Louis, 2019). Should they use public recognition as an incentive or not? If recognition increases charitable giving by some people, how can the organization avoid a situation in which it reduces giving by others? Would it help if the organization communicates explicitly that the recipients of social approval were not asked for their consent? Can the charitable organization assist by giving donors an opportunity to decline social appraisals of their generous behavior (Gneezy, Meier, & Rey-Biel, 2011)? The studies we report in this article address these questions. We investigate whether and how social approval information might be differentiated, depending on people's need for it, in an effort to maximize charitable giving.

We conducted a series of experiments to test whether the effect of public recognition depends on donors' need for approval. In particular, we manipulated the public (vs. private) dimension of recognition, its optional (vs. set) nature, and whether the message communicated that the donor did not solicit this recognition. The results suggest that a personal need for approval moderates the effect of public recognition on the decision to donate. It increases donations among people with a higher need for approval but reduces them among people with a lower need for approval. We also find that this negative effect can be neutralized by making the recognition optional. Finally, we uncover increased donations when the communication makes it salient that the public recognition was imposed on the donors. Assuming that an observer may be suspicious about donors' true motives, this increase seemingly results because the information reduces donors' concerns.

Theoretical framework

Many authors acknowledge public recognition as an important prosocial motive (e.g., Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005; Wu, Zhao, Zhang & Liu, 2018; Van Teunenbroek, Bekkers & Beersma, 2020), though research into charitable giving provides some mixed results. Proponents of a positive impact argue that people who give to charity are generally held in high regard (Wiepking, 2008). When the behavior is made public, the consequences for the donor should be positive (Alpizar, Carlsson, & Johansson-Stenman, 2008), so public recognition would represent a complementary motivation to engage in such behaviors. However, studies also identify negative effects of social incentives on prosocial behaviors (Ariely, Bracha, & Meier, 2009; Gneezy & Rustichini, 2000; Simpson et al., 2017) and offer two main explanations for this phenomenon.

First, though generous behaviors are socially encouraged, the presence of public recognition can raise suspicion about the true motives of the donor. Potential donors worry that observers will question the extent to which their donation is still motivated by intrinsic factors (Bénabou & Tirole, 2006). If observers instead perceive that the donor has been motivated by public recognition, it can be detrimental for the donor's reputation, due to the strong norm to be modest about good deeds. Bragging about a generous deed is generally counterproductive, because it signals selfish motives and reduces the altruistic dimension of the behavior (Berman et al., 2015).

Second, when generous behavior stems from personal, intrinsic motives, extrinsic rewards such as public recognition may conflict with the initial drivers of generosity. As suggested by Gneezy et al. (2011), recognition can be counterproductive if an intrinsic motivation, such as guilt relief or self-image, is crowded out by extrinsic incentives. In such cases, visibility (and the resulting recognition) would reduce the likelihood of generous behavior. These explanations in turn suggest that the impact of recognition on generosity depends on the individual donor's initial motives, as well as the value that she or he attaches to observers' valuation.

The need for social approval

The need for social approval refers to the extent to which a person seeks recognition and peers' implicit or explicit agreement with exhibited behavior (Mukai, Kambara, & Sasaki, 1998; Sosik & Dinger, 2007; Twenge & Im, 2007). As Strickland and Crowne (1962) explain, a person with a high need for social approval strongly desires to present him- or herself in a favorable light. This personal tendency to seek acceptance differs strongly among individuals (Alpizar et al., 2008; Bateson, Nettle & Roberts, 2006; Hebert et al., 1997). Its influence also depends on whether the focal behaviors take place in public or private settings (Bagozzi, Wong, Abe, & Bergami, 2014).

On the basis of these insights, we posit that, depending on the donor's personal need for social approval (NSA), the prospect of a public recognition has contrasting effects on donation likelihood. Among people with high NSA, public recognition should facilitate donations, because their generous behaviors are socially encouraged and praised (Berman et al., 2015). Peer approval is unlikely to motivate people with low NSA to donate, and the prospect of public recognition might further crowd out their intrinsic motivations to make a donation. People with the lowest NSA even could despise such public forms of appraisal. For them, the prospect of a public recognition conflicts with their prior motives to donate and therefore reduces their donations. Formally, we hypothesize that NSA moderates the effect of public recognition on charitable giving, such that

> H_1: For people (a) with high NSA, public recognition increases donation likelihood relative to the absence of recognition, whereas for those (b) with low NSA, public recognition decreases donation likelihood relative to the absence of recognition.

For charitable organizations, offering some recognition to donors is important; it signals that the donation has high personal cost and therefore deserves to be rewarded or acknowledged in some way (Gneezy et al., 2011). In some cases, the mere knowledge that the behavior is worth rewarding may be enough to motivate prosocial behaviors (Mishra & Singh, 2015), and actual rewards are not mandatory. One solution thus may be to propose (but not impose) public recognition. This proposed recognition signals that the donation is appreciated but still allows the donor to refrain from opting-in, so it should avoid the crowding-out effect of public recognition. Among people with low NSA, this optional form of public recognition should have a positive impact on donation, because it acknowledges the generous deed without undermining the donors' initial motives to donate. Conversely, for people with high NSA, public recognition is a motive to donate, and they appreciate being recognized. However, having to ask for this recognition appears similar to bragging about one's own generosity, which can backfire (Berman et al., 2015). Therefore, we predict that they appreciate public recognition that is issued as the default, which encourages them see the recognition as a fair reward for their good deed. We propose:

> H_2: For people (a) with low NSA, an optional form of public recognition increases donation likelihood relative to set public recognition, but for those (b) with high NSA, an optional form of public recognition decreases donation likelihood relative to set public recognition.

As mentioned previously, suspicion among observers about motivations to give may lead donors to worry about how the public recognition from an organization is perceived by their peers. This concern is especially pertinent for people with high NSA, who depend more on others' opinions. We therefore argue that providing evidence that the public recognition has been imposed (not requested by them) could reduce donors' concerns about suspicion from potential observers, which in turn would increase donation likelihood among people high in NSA:

> H_3: For people with high NSA, providing evidence that the public recognition has been imposed on donors increases donation likelihood relative to the absence of such evidence.

Figure 1 summarizes the hypotheses.

Figure 1. General hypotheses
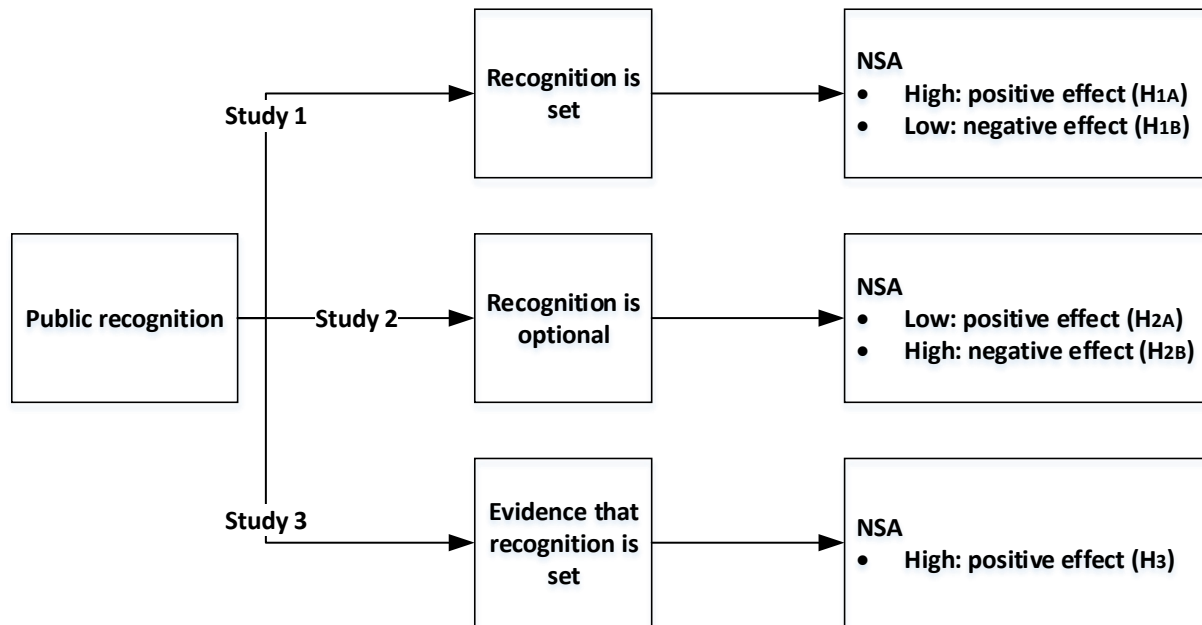
Experimental design

We conducted three online experiments in which we manipulated the nature of the recognition people might receive after engaging in generous behavior. To make the cover story realistic, we presented the study as a survey of physical activity and sports viewing habits. In all three studies, participants first noted their weekly physical activities and their interest in global sporting events (see Appendix 1). Next, they were offered a financial reward (5 euros), which they could keep or donate to charity. To fit with the cover story, the questionnaire appeared on sports-related pages and sport clubs' brand pages on Facebook. People visiting these pages know that their own posts and posts made on their behalf (e.g., to reward them for a donation) will be seen by peer groups of other Facebook users, including their personal Facebook friends and others who share their interests. Therefore, this social network offers good opportunities to prime donors with public recognition. Posting thank you messages on donors' personal Facebook walls makes the generous behavior of the study participants directly visible to all their contacts.

Measures

To measure need for social approval, we used a 20-item, five-point Likert scale developed by Martin (1984), which is a revised and validated measure of the approval motivation scale

developed by Larsen, Martin, Ettinger, and Nelson (1976). Unlike some studies dealing with social approval, we did not use the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability (MCSD) scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960), because it was designed initially not to measure people's motivation to obtain social approval but rather to assess socially desirable response tendencies (Martin, 1984). Therefore, the MSCD scale might measure defensiveness rather than social approval seeking (Allaman, Joyce, & Crandall, 1972; Berger, Levin, Jacobson, & Millham, 1977; Martin, 1984; Millham & Kellog, 1980; Thaw & Efran, 1967). The scale we use includes five dimensions (conformity, internal–external control, need for social support, Machiavellianism, and social cost), and the NSA score is the average across all 20 items. We included it, along with the questions about participants' physical activities, in the first part of the questionnaire. In all studies, the scale achieved satisfactory Cronbach's alpha values (>.9).

Dependent variable and debrief

Participants in all studies also received their financial compensation at the end of the questionnaire, which they could keep for themselves or donate to a charitable cause. Across the different studies, we manipulated the forms of recognition to test their effects on donation likelihood. To ensure the results were not affected by people's like or dislike for any specific organization or cause, participants could choose to donate to a set of 10 well-known beneficiaries. In all studies, participants also were debriefed at the end, such that we informed them that the study was part of a larger project to study donation behavior. We also told them that there was no financial reward and that no message would be posted on their Facebook wall. Once debriefed, participants could decide to invalidate the questionnaire; to the best of our knowledge, no one did. Table 1 provides details about the samples of all studies.

Table 1. Summary of studies

Study 1	No recognition (n=108)		Private recognition (n=105)		Public recognition (n=105)	
Average age	33.38		34.21		36.24	
Std. deviation age	9.95		9.53		9.54	
Percentage men	53.7		54.3		53.3	
Low NSA (%)	29.6		28.6		28.6	
Medium NSA (%)	40.8		38.1		41.9	
High NSA (%)	29.6		33.3		29.5	
Study 2	No recognition (n=103)		Imposed public (n=102)		Optional public (n=101)	
Average age	30.84		31.19		30.2	
Std. deviation age	9.68		8.43		8.06	
Percentage men	55.3		54.9		52.5	
Low NSA (%)	28.2		27.5		29.7	
Medium NSA (%)	41.7		43.1		44.6	
High NSA (%)	30.1		29.4		25.7	
Study 3	Imposed unspecified (n=102)	Imposed specified (n=103)	Optional unspecified (n=104)	Optional specified (104)		
Average age	33.45	34.8	34.21	32.16		
Std. deviation age	8.01	10.08	11.32	10.18		
Percentage men	52.9	56.31	54.8	56.31		
Low NSA (%)	29.4	28.2	29.8	29.8		
Medium NSA (%)	40.2	41.7	41.3	42.3		
High NSA (%)	30.4	30.1	28.9	27.9		

Notes: Donation likelihood is evaluated at 1 standard deviation above and below the mean need for social approval (NSA) value.

Study 1

Design

With Study 1, we test whether NSA moderates the causal relationship between public recognition and charitable giving. Furthermore, we aimed to assess whether this effect could be influenced by the public (vs. private) dimension of the behavior. We recruited 329 native French speakers through Facebook, by placing invitations to participate on sports-related Facebook pages. When they clicked on the accompanying link, they were randomly assigned to one of three recognition

conditions in a single-factor, between-subjects design. In the *no-recognition group*, people who decided to donate had the opportunity to choose a beneficiary from among the list, with no promise of any form of recognition. In the *private* condition, participants were notified that in the event of a donation, they would receive a personal thank you e-mail from the fundraising manager. In the *public* condition, the recognition consisted of a thank you message from the beneficiary organization, posted on the donor's Facebook wall. These recognition conditions were set, with no possibility for the donor to decline. Because participants could either donate or keep the financial reward, the dependent variable was binomial (0 = no donation; 1 = donation). As a manipulation check, following a donation, participants had to confirm they knew they would receive a (public or private) message. If they answered incorrectly, their questionnaire was excluded from the final sample. Eleven participants failed the manipulation check, leaving 318 responses for the statistical analysis (53.7% men; mean age=33.78; SD age=9.71).

Results

We tested for variance homogeneity on NSA and found no differences across the three conditions. The logistic regression on the decision to donate included two independent variables: the form of a recognition offered to the respondent (or its absence as the reference category) and the level of NSA (continuous), such that we tested for both main and interaction effects. We find that the prospect of private recognition has no significant effect on the decision to donate ($\beta = .48; Wald = 1.51; p = .22$), whereas the prospect of public recognition increases donation likelihood ($\beta = .77; Wald = 4.22; p < .05$). The NSA level exerts no significant direct effect on the decision to donate, but it moderates the effect of public recognition ($\beta = 1.55; z = 4.18; p < .01$). With a spotlight analysis (Fitzsimons 2008; Spiller, Fitzsimons, Lynch, & McClelland, 2013), we evaluate the effect of recognition type at 1 standard deviation (SD) below and 1 SD above the mean of the NSA scale, as depicted in Figure 2. The prospect of public recognition significantly increases donation likelihood for people high in NSA ($\beta = 2.49; z = 3.99; p < .01$) but significantly decreases it among people low in NSA ($\beta = -1.43; z = 4.18; p < .01$). To explore this significant interaction, we used the Johnson-Neyman floodlight analysis technique (Johnson & Neyman 1936; Spiller et al. 2013) and find that the prospect of public recognition significantly increases the propensity to donate among people with relatively higher NSA (i.e., those who scored at least .19 SD above the mean on the NSA scale; 38.36% of respondents).

Conversely, the prospect of public recognition decreases the propensity to donate among people with relatively lower NSA (those who scored at least .99 SD below the mean on the NSA scale; 28.93% of respondents).

Figure 2. Set (public) recognition on charitable donations
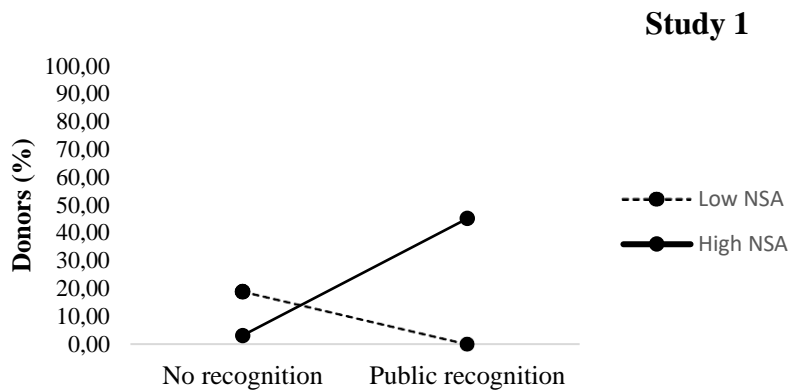
These results support both H_{1a} and H_{1b}, which predict opposite effects of public recognition. By depicting these results graphically in Figure 3, we demonstrate the percentage of participants who donated in each condition, depending on their NSA level.

Figure 3. General results
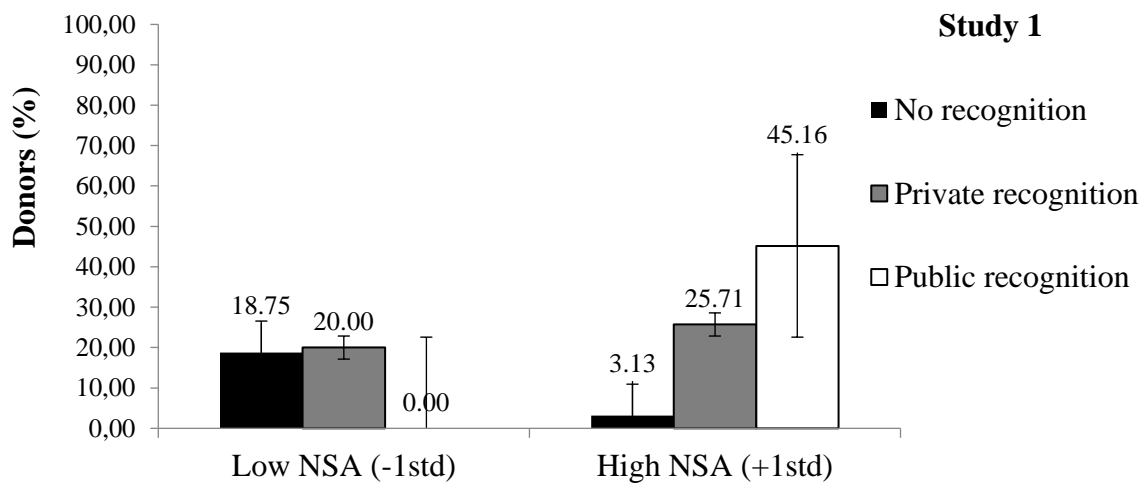
Study 2

Design

Next we test for the impact of optional (vs. set) recognition. In line with our theoretical predictions, people low in NSA may prefer not to be forced to receive public thanks, which then should limit the potential crowding-out effect. Conversely, people high in NSA may not appreciate having to ask for the thank you message, because it might feel like bragging about their generosity. Using the same recruitment method as in Study 1, we gathered and randomly assigned 313 respondents to one of the three recognition conditions (no recognition, set public recognition, optional public recognition). In the *set public* condition, the thank you message was automatically posted on Facebook; participants in the *optional public* condition instead had an opportunity to decline the message. In this sense, people were asked to opt in if they wanted the acknowledgement. Noting that the overall percentage of donors was very low in Study 1, we slightly changed the experimental procedure for Study 2; asking people to give away a financial reward they just earned for their effort might be evoke unfairness perceptions, which could limit their likelihood to "give back." Therefore, in Study 2 participants read that they had an opportunity to donate 40% of their financial compensation to an organization (2 euros). Thus the participants could still be generous while retaining some compensation for their effort. The measure of NSA and other procedural details were identical to Study 1. Seven participants failed the manipulation check of the optional versus set nature of the message, leaving 306 usable responses for analysis (54.2% men; mean age=30.75; SD age=8.74).

Results

With this single-factor, between-subjects design with three conditions (no recognition, public set, public optional), we first tested for variance homogeneity on NSA and find no differences across conditions. The logistic regression on the decision to donate includes two independent variables: the type of recognition proposed to the respondent (and its absence as the reference category) and the level of NSA. As in Study 1, the prospect of (set) public recognition increases donation likelihood ($\beta = .58; Wald = 4.10; p < .05$). In line with our prior results, the effect of public recognition also is moderated by the level of NSA ($\beta = 1.13; z = 4.21; p < .01$), such that the prospect of public recognition increases donation likelihood among people high in NSA ($\beta =$

1.93; $z = 4.29$; $p < .01$) and decreases it among people low in NSA ($\beta = -.78$; $z = -1.8$; $p < .05$). The floodlight analysis (Johnson & Neyman, 1936; Spiller et al., 2013) indicates that the prospect of (set) public recognition significantly increases the propensity to donate among people with relatively higher NSA (at least .18 SD above the mean on the NSA scale; 33.98% of respondents). Conversely, the prospect of (set) public recognition decreases the propensity to donate among people with relatively lower NSA (at least .89 SD below the mean on the NSA scale; 29.08% of respondents). These results again support H_{1a} and H_{1b}.

Furthermore, the prospect of optional public recognition increases donation likelihood ($\beta = 1.31$; $Wald = 19.5$; $p < .01$), but the interaction effect with the level of NSA is non-significant ($\beta = .09$; $z = .36$; $p < .72$). That is, the presence of optional public recognition (relative to no recognition) increases charitable donations, regardless of people's NSA level, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Optional (public) recognition on charitable donations
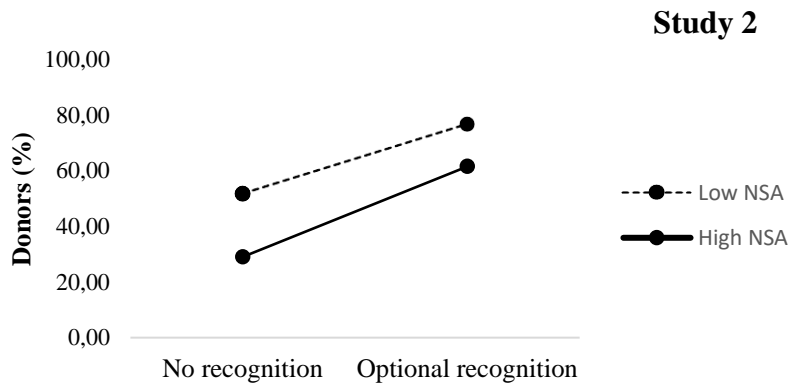
Compared with set public recognition, the prospect of optional public recognition also appears to increase donation likelihood among participants ($\beta = .73$; $Wald = 6.26$; $p < .05$). This positive effect is moderated by the level of NSA ($\beta = -1.04$; $z = -3.9$; $p < .01$). Relative to imposing public recognition, simply offering this optional recognition increases the propensity to donate among people low in NSA ($\beta = 1.99$; $z = 4.41$; $p < .01$), in support of H_{2a}. As might be expected, none of the low NSA participants actually asked for the thank you message. Among

people with high NSA, the effect appears non-significant ($\beta = -.49; z = -1.13; p = .26$), so we cannot confirm H$_{2b}$. The floodlight analysis (Johnson & Neyman, 1936; Spiller et al., 2013) indicates that proposing (relative to imposing) public recognition significantly increases people's propensity to donate if they have a relatively lower need for social approval (at least .17 SD below the mean on the NSA scale; 65.35% of respondents). The Study 2 results, depicted in Figure 5, indicate the percentage of participants who donated in each condition depending on their NSA level, that is, at 1 SD below and above the mean.

Figure 5. General results
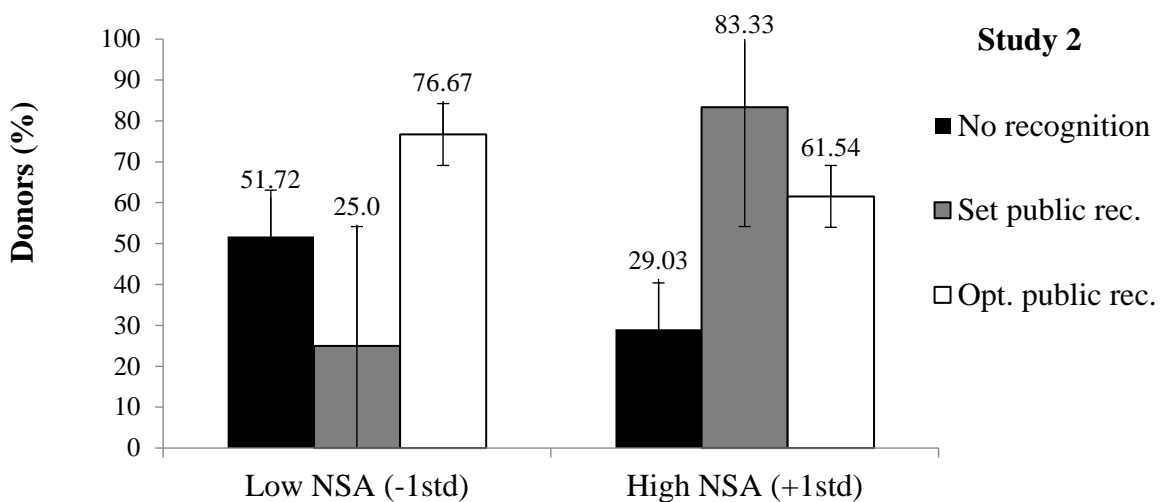
Study 3

Design

In Study 3, we aim to specify the risks of using public recognition. If potential observers who see thank you messages posted on Facebook suspect the donors' true motives, it would ruin the social benefits associated with the prosocial behavior (Bénabou & Tirole, 2006). Therefore, donors' concerns about this potential suspicion may keep them from donating. In Study 3 we therefore assign 426 participants to a 2×2 between-subjects design, in which we manipulated the set (vs. optional) nature of the public recognition, as well as whether (specified) or not (unspecified) the message indicated that the recognition had been imposed on participants. In the *specified* conditions (set and optional), the message included a note that indicated the obligatory or optional nature of the recognition. Potential witnesses then would be aware whether the donor had any choice other than to receive it. In a pretest, 25 participants reviewed the message in the

set specified condition, then had to select from a list of elements that they remembered from the message. Twenty-two respondents correctly identified the notification about the obligatory nature of the message. We also asked these pretest respondents how they would perceive this message if they saw it on the Facebook wall of a friend ("I would think s/he asked for the message," "I would think he had no choice but to get the message"). Twenty-one of the 25 respondents answered that they would think their Facebook contact had no choice but to have the message published. In the main experiment, all other procedural details were identical to Study 2. Both manipulations were subjected to a manipulation check, and 13 respondents failed at least one of the manipulation checks, leaving 413 valid responses for analysis (54.9% men; mean age=33.63; SD age=9.97).

Results

For this a 2 (set vs. optional) × 2 (unspecified vs. specified) between-subjects design, we first test for variance homogeneity on NSA and find no differences. We ran a logistic regression on the decision to donate with three independent variables: the set (vs. optional) nature of the recognition (set as the reference category), the specified nature of the message (unspecified as the reference category), and the level of NSA. We included all interaction effects in the model. In line with the results from Study 2, proposing, rather than imposing, recognition significantly increases donation likelihood among participants ($\beta = .80$; $Wald = 14.86$; $p < .01$). Again, this positive effect is moderated by the level of NSA ($\beta = -.70$; $z = -3.95; p < .01$). The floodlight analysis (Johnson & Neyman, 1936; Spiller et al., 2013) reveals that proposing rather than imposing public recognition significantly increases the propensity to donate among people with relatively lower NSA (at least .38 SD below the mean on the NSA scale; 66.1% of respondents). Consistent with our theorizing, none of the low NSA participants opted-in for public recognition.

The logistic regression also indicates that specifying the set nature of the recognition (relative to not specifying) significantly increases donation likelihood ($\beta = .46$; $Wald = 4.86$; $p < .05$). This positive effect appears moderated by the level of NSA ($\beta = .36$; $z = 2.11; p < .05$). In support of H$_3$, the floodlight analysis (Johnson & Neyman, 1936; Spiller et al., 2013) reveals that specifying the set nature of the recognition significantly increases the propensity to donate among people with relatively higher NSA (at least .23 SD above the mean on the NSA scale; 60.77% of

respondents). The results in Figure 6 indicate the percentage of participants who donated in each condition, depending on their NSA level, defined at 1 SD below and above the mean.

Figure 6. General results
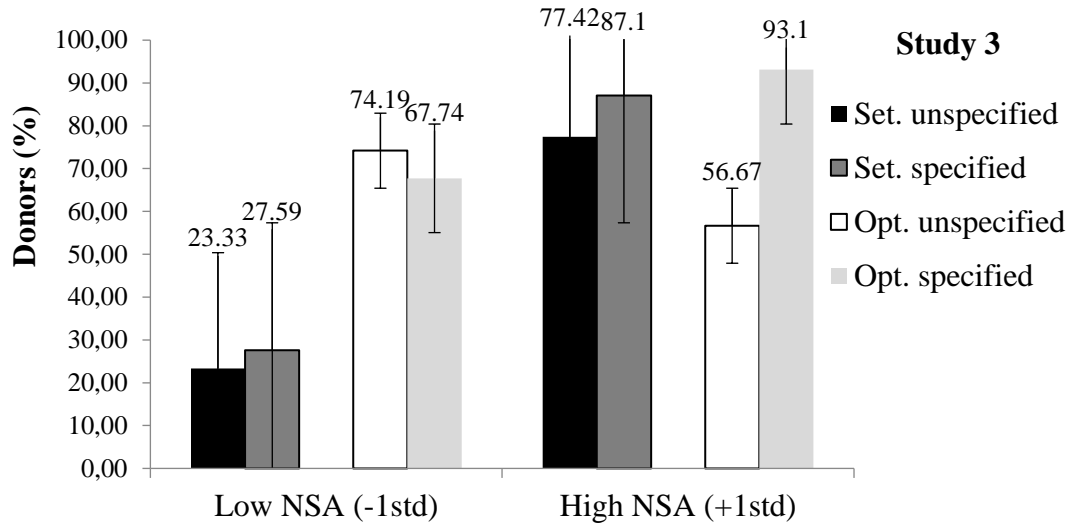
General discussion

This research provides strong evidence of a moderating effect of the need for social approval on the relation between public recognition and charitable giving. Specifically, we show that the prospect of a public form of recognition can evoke opposite effects on charitable giving, depending on people's NSA.

A prosocial effect when NSA is high

Among those with high NSA, public recognition offers a motive to donate in Studies 1–3, in line with the positive effect proposed by Bekkers and Schuyt (2008). The results from Study 2 clarify that among people with high NSA, the set or optional nature of recognition does not influence charitable donations; having to ask for the thank you message is not detrimental to their charitable giving, as long as the message remains public. Although this result contrasts with our initial prediction (H_{2b}), it reinforces the notion that people with higher needs for social approval are mostly motivated by extrinsic motives (here, public recognition). High NSA donors appear indifferent to having to ask for public recognition. Furthermore, the validation of H_3 suggests their desire to communicate that the message was imposed (not requested), even in conditions in

which they ask for the message. As Andreoni and Petrie (2004) explain, socially encouraged behaviors can lead to recognition if the benefactor communicates intelligently about the actions, but other-oriented behaviors can be detrimental to the person's social image if their performance is obviously done in anticipation of praise. To explain why high NSA donors do not mind lying to potential observers (i.e., the message is optional but they claim it is imposed), we posit that they might be driven by their desire to remove any doubt or suspicion about their motives. Providing public evidence to potential observers that the message is imposed (not asked for) would help reassure that there will be little suspicion of his or her motives (Bénabou & Tirole, 2006; Berman et al., 2015). Our findings even suggest that the positive impact on charitable giving is stronger when donors believe they can avoid sparking doubts about observers about their initial motivations.

A crowding out effect when NSA is low

Conversely, public forms of recognition reduce donation likelihood among people low in NSA and when the organization communicates about the automatic nature of the thank you message. This finding suggests that the risk of others' suspicion (Bénabou & Tirole, 2006) is less salient for donors who are less interested in seeking peers' approval. Rather, our results seem to align with Gneezy et al.'s (2011) predictions of an internal conflict between prior intrinsic motives to do good and the prospect of public recognition. This admittedly tentative explanation is supported by the findings from Studies 2 and 3 that none of the low NSA donors asked for the thank you message in the optional condition. Among this category of donors, it appears that public recognition might crowd out their initial expected benefits, such as guilt relief (Basil, Ridgway, & Basil, 2008) or warm glow feelings (Crumpler & Grossman, 2008; Mayo & Tinsley, 2009). Although they systematically declined this recognition in our studies, low NSA donors still might be sensitive to the idea of public recognition (not just the recognition itself). Proposing (not imposing) a public form of recognition thus could be a way for charities to acknowledge the value of their donation behavior, without evoking the negative crowding-out effect. Furthermore, declining the recognition might reinforce perceptions of sacrifice and thereby increase the good feelings associated with donations. Our study reveals the importance of NSA as a moderator of people's responses to public recognitions of their donation behavior, but the results further suggest that NSA might be a more complex psychological construct than previously thought. In

particular, they are systematically consistent with the proposition that even if everybody values social approval, people low in NSA are more concerned with avoiding social disapproval, whereas people high in NSA seek manifest displays of social approval. In our studies, participants low in NSA are not simply indifferent to social approval; they actively try to avoid social disapproval. This insight constitutes a valuable avenue for further research, in the domain of prosocial behavior and beyond.

Conclusion and future research

This study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions in which public recognition influences charitable giving. Although public recognition is widely identified as a key driver of prosocial behaviors (Penner et al., 2005), we shed new light on its uncertain effects on charitable giving (Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius, 2007). Our results highlight the moderating effect of people's need for approval, which helps explain prior mixed results, and they suggest a crowding-out effect of public recognition, in support of Gneezy et al.'s (2011) theorizing. Moreover, these results provide notable recommendations for charitable organizations, most of which offer some type of recognition to donors. In that respect, we caution against the use of undifferentiated public recognition, which is likely to leave people with low NSA indifferent or even inhibit their propensity to donate. If organizations cannot make the recognition optional, they should provide clear indications that the public recognition was not solicited by the recipient, available to all potential observers of the donation behavior.

Despite our efforts to disguise the true purpose of our studies, some participants might have seen through the cover story, exposing the results to a demand effect. However, a demand explanation appears unlikely, in that the between-subjects designs limited participants' awareness of any experimental conditions other than their own. For a demand explanation to hold, participants' insight into the differential effects of different rewards would also have to be profound to produce the observed cross-over interactions of NSA with the specific social reward variations.

Intention to give does not always result in giving (Shang, Sargeant & Carpenter, 2019). In that respect, our will for a behavioral measure of the dependent variable forced us to temporarily deceive the participants. To comply with research ethics, no monetary incentive was proposed to recruit participants in any of our studies. Indeed, the financial reward used to elicit behavioral

response was presented only when participants entered the very last part of the questionnaire. However, one might consider this as a deceptive approach, and this is why we offered the opportunity for participants to withdraw their questionnaire once they were debriefed.

Finally, each study suggests some avenues for further research. In Study 1 we tested differential responses to public and private recognition, operationalized as either a public, announced Facebook post or a private, announced e-mail message. Yet other differences exist between a social media post and an e-mail. At the moment we conducted this study, this operationalization offered the least confusing way to manipulate the public versus private nature of a message in a digital context, because e-mails are more private. But as more differentiated social media continue to emerge, further research might test their usefulness as channels for public versus private recognition more explicitly. Furthermore, both social media and e-mail providers allow users to install filters, which we did not consider. Continued studies thus might determine systematically whether and how the use of filters in social media is associated with the need for social approval. Plausibly, people low in NSA may be more likely to rely on filters to shield themselves from social media feedback, whether positive and negative.

In Studies 2 and 3 we manipulated the optional or obligatory nature of a public recognition message. Giving people an option introduces the notion of choice, which most people value (Botti, 2004). Therefore, this condition might appear attractive, regardless of the precise nature of the choice. This confound arguably might constitute an alternative explanation for the main effect, but it cannot explain the interaction with NSA that is the focus of our study. Therefore, we do not anticipate that the validity of our studies is hindered by this potential confound. Still, continued research might expand on the different ways charities can use various media to communicate the nature of the recognition they offer in return for donations.

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