The Effect of Others' Participation on Charitable Behavior: Bandwagon or Bystander? An Abstract

Ashesh Mukherjee and Seung Yun Lee

Abstract Charities sometimes use information about others' participation to influence potential donors. Two streams of research on social norms and the bystander effect appear to predict opposite effects of others' participation on charitable behavior. We reconcile these conflicting perspectives by identifying a broader theoretical framework based on agency-communion motives that accounts for both positive and negative effects of others' participation on charitable behavior. Based on our theoretical framework, we show that others' participation has a positive effect on charitable behavior when recipient resources are low but a negative effect on charitable behavior when recipient resources are high. Consistent with our theoretical framework, we show that these positive and negative effects of others' participation are mediated, respectively, by perceived informativeness of social norm and perceived responsibility for achieving the campaign's goals. Further consistent with our framework, we show that manipulating agentic-communion motives modifies the effects of others' participation and recipient resources on charitable behavior. This research makes a contribution by identifying recipient resources as a new moderator and agency-communion motives as a new mechanism underlying the effect of others' participation on charitable behavior.

References available upon request.

A. Mukherjee (✉)
McGill University, Montréal, QC, Canada
e-mail: ashesh.mukherjee@mcgill.ca

S.Y. Lee
Konkuk University, Seoul, South Korea
e-mail: seungyun@konkuk.ac.kr