



An Insight Into the Charitable Giving of Young Adults & Students

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Key findings

- Over half of respondents (52%) aged 25+ donate to charity once per month, whilst only 17% of young adults donate this frequently
- The average donation amount among young adults (aged 15-24) is £8.82, compared to £15.49 for those aged 25+
- Young adults donate the most to homeless care, animal welfare and childcare charities
- Adults aged 25+ donate the most to homeless care, environmental and medical charities
- About 20% of students regard their income as problematic
- Just 24% of students donate to charity on at least a monthly basis
- 91% of young adults use social media and 54% have donated online

Acknowledgements

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Section 1

Foreword

More and more people - both in the UK and overseas - are increasingly dependent on the work of charities. There has been a steady decline of household charitable donations in recent years, due to a wide range of internal and external factors ([CAF 2014](#))¹. Out of necessity, charities need to grow and adapt to meet these demands, spread their message and, ultimately, increase revenue. However, with governmental cuts and a workforce on wages still recovering from the Great Recession ([NCVO 2015](#))², the onus is increasingly on charities to produce their own funding.

Young adults, or 'millennials' - those aged 15-24 - are the least charitable age group: only [42% take part in charitable giving](#)³. As charities may invest less of their resources in targeting young adults because this group has less money to give, they are a relatively untapped market for charitable actions. Charities have a huge potential to engage with young adults online, to create a brand awareness and spread the importance of their message. In the long term, it would revolutionise the charity sector. Our findings show that young adults and students see charities as having an important function in today's society. Our evidence also suggests that, when prompted to engage with charities, young adults are more generous than they think they are.

In 2014, the Ice Bucket Challenge took the country by storm, and it is easy to see why. Young adults in particular felt inspired and connected. Whether or not the participants knew why they were pouring ice over themselves, it was fun, it was popular and donating was easy to do.

Typically, students and young adults don't have much money to spare. They certainly have less to spare compared to the rest of the population. However, many have some to spare, but this is often overlooked. If charities focussed on harnessing the imagination of young adults - and building relationships, engagement and non-monetary participation - the positive effects would be felt decades into the future.

Introduction

Previous research suggests that young adults are the least generous age group when it comes to donating to charity. Just 26% of 15-24 year olds have donated to charity in the past 4 weeks, and only 42% participated in “charitable giving or social action”, according to [CAF Online](#)⁴ in 2015. Our research attempts to provide an insight as to what triggers this behaviour, whether it be a shift in attitudes about charities, or financial constraints.

There is plenty of data regarding which demographics donate to charity. The [NCVO estimates](#)⁵ that, in the UK, 49% of women and 47% of men donate to charity. Students and young adults will represent a small percentage of this amount. We want to measure and understand how charities are perceived by young adults. If this age group has a positive view of charities, that would suggest that their lower frequency of charitable donations are merely down to financial constraints, and they will begin to make regular donations once they’re in a suitable position to do so.

Aside from monetary donations, our survey was also designed to capture the other ways in which young adults and students donate participate in charitable giving, such as volunteering or donating clothing. Some interesting statistics have emerged as a result of these measurements.

One important area to measure is the impact that a charity’s online presence has on its growth. Whilst measuring online donations is a straightforward process, gauging the extent to which people connect with charities online is more difficult: it’s not as simple as the number of Facebook likes or Twitter followers. Our research has assessed whether charities having an online presence has an effect on the way young people give, given that they are the most active demographic online and on social media ([ONS, 2013](#))⁶.

Finally, our survey measured donation behaviour, by incorporating a similar version of Dr Rene Bekkers’ “[Dictator Game](#)”⁷ (2007). 204 respondents completed a particular version of the survey which made them eligible to enter into a £50 prize draw. Whilst this prize was an incentive for survey completion, it was also used in order to gauge the extent to which their self-reported attitudes towards charitable giving were reflected in their actuated behaviours.

**Data Collection:
Online Survey**

The Reason Digital survey was completed by 425 respondents, 376 of which are “millennials” - (15-24 year olds).

TABLE 1.1

15-24	25-30	31-40	41-54	55-64	TOTAL
376	17	18	11	3	425

The survey was completed online only via two main streams; the main Reason Digital survey (Group 1 - 201) and the same survey but distributed by AudienceNet (Group 2 - 224). The second set of respondents did not have the opportunity to enter the prize draw (and therefore take part in the “Dictator Game”).

Those who did enter into the £50 prize draw were given the opportunity to donate some, or all, of this to charity if they were to win. It is possible that respondents may have responded in a way they would want to be perceived, rather than reflecting their ‘true’ behaviours. It is not possible to say how much of an effect this has had on our results.

TABLE 1.2

Group 1 Entered prize draw	Group 2 Did not enter prize draw	Group 2 all did not enter prize draw	TOTAL
179	122	224	425

277 of the respondents are students, with the vast majority of those being aged 15-24.

TABLE 1.3

	Millenial	25-30	31-40	41-54	55-64	TOTAL
Student	274	1	2	0	0	277
Not a student	102	16	16	11	3	148
TOTAL	376	17	18	11	3	425

Section 2

Who donates, what do they donate and to who?

One of our primary research areas is aimed at building a picture of who donates, what they donate (money, time or expertise, for example), and who they donate to.

Who donates? Young adults and attitudes towards charity

The survey contained a series of attitudinal questions, with the intention of finding out more about participants' self-reported beliefs regarding charity, in terms of the role they believe charities play in society today, and how important their work is.

The participants were presented with a series of statements and asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each on a 5-point Likert scale.

We would expect to see a correlation between those who believe charity to be an important function of society, and those who exhibit charitable behaviours to a greater extent.

“Charities play an important role in society”

86% of young adults **agreed**

100% of respondents aged 25+ **agreed**

74% of respondents aged 25+ chose “**strongly agree**”, whereas only **32%** of young adults strongly agreed.

“I think it is important to support charities”

85% of young adults **agreed**

96% of respondents aged 25+ **agreed**

As above, millennials again reflected a weaker belief in the benefits of charity: only 38% of young adults “strongly agreed” with the statement, compared to 53% of those aged 25+.

“In 10 years time, I see myself supporting charities more than I do now”

74% of young adults **agreed**

64% of respondents aged 25+ **agreed**

We would have expected more young adults to see themselves donating more in the future - on the basis that they are younger, and the older respondents may feel they already give their ideal amount to charity. This theory is underlined by the finding that, of those aged 41-54, 25% said that they “disagree” and 25% said that they “neither agree nor disagree” ($p < 0.05$).

“I make an informed decision about the charities I support”

74% of young adults **agreed**

96% of respondents aged 25+ **agreed**

22% of young adults said they **“neither agree nor disagree”** - whereas only 2% of those aged 25+ gave this response.

Out of all the responses to attitude statements, this one received the fewest percentage of young adults saying that they agree. This may be because young adults have not found the need to affiliate with a particular charity or charities.

The higher percentage of young adults answering “neither agree nor disagree” may also reflect a higher level of ambivalence towards charity compared to the wider population.

Based upon the responses to the attitude statements above, we cannot say for certain that a millennial having access to more money would necessarily lead to an increase in charitable behaviour.

However, whilst young adults are less tangibly engaged with charities, there still appears to be a broader appreciation of the work done by charities, and the majority of young adults see themselves donating more in the future.

What do young adults donate?

This section measures how different attitudes translate into charitable actions.

We asked the respondents **how often** they give to charity. Table 2.1 shows the percentage of young adults and those aged 25+ who donate to charity at a given frequency. Each figure represents the share within its corresponding age group.

	Young adults	Others aged 25+
Once a week	5.8%	10.9%
Once a month	17.3%	52.2%
Every now and then	50.7%	30.4%
Once a year	6.3%	2.2%
Less than once a year	8.7%	4.3%
Never	11.3%	0%
	100%	100%

TABLE 2.1

Young adults donate a lot less frequently than those aged 25+, which we would expect given the responses to the above attitudinal statements. The “once a month” category is particularly interesting; the percentage of ‘aged 25+’ group donating this often is about **3 times higher** than young adults. Interestingly, none of the older group selected “never”.

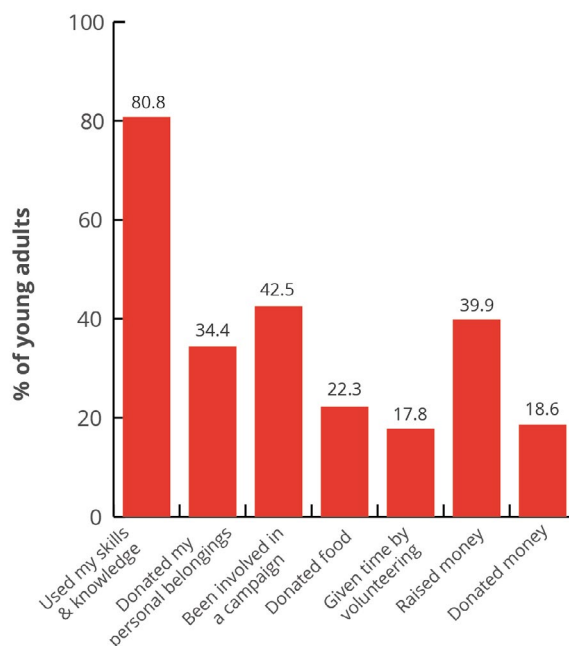
We also asked respondents how much money they gave the last time they donated to charity. The mean results echoed the attitude questions: **millennials donated an average of of £8.82**, whereas respondents **aged 25+ donated £15.49**. Of course, on average, young adults will receive a yearly income that is significantly less than that of the older age group.

Respondents also indicated the types of **charitable or social action** they have been involved in over the last year. Their answers are shown and labelled in the two pie

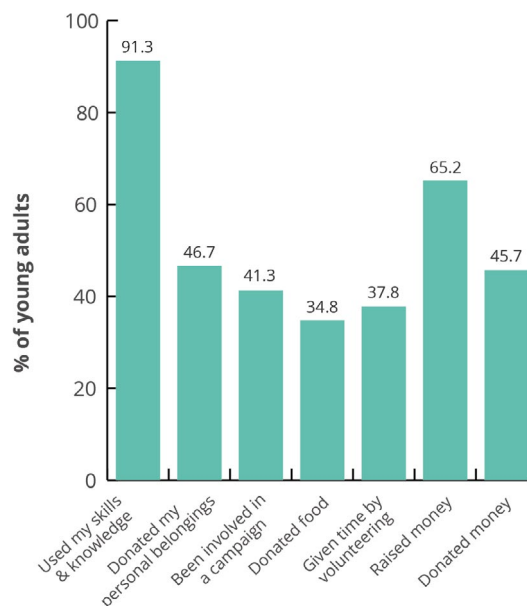
charts below. The first pie chart shows the most common charitable actions amongst young adults, and the second shows the most common amongst others (note that both pie charts add up to more than 100% to reflect the fact that respondents could select more than one activity each).

The “**given my time by volunteering**” segment of the first pie chart has been emphasised in the visualisation to represent the fact that this is the **only activity** that more young adults have participated in more than those aged 25+. The results from our survey would suggest that, as well as contributing a lower mean donation amount, millennials, on average, also perform fewer other charitable actions than non-millennials.

% of young adults who took part in charitable actions in the past year



% of people aged 25+ who took part in charitable actions in the past year



Who do young adults donate to?

To further try and understand charitable donation patterns with young adults and students, we asked respondents to select the **three charity ‘types’ they would be most likely to support**.

% of young adults who chose charity sector ‘X’ as one of the three they are most likely to support

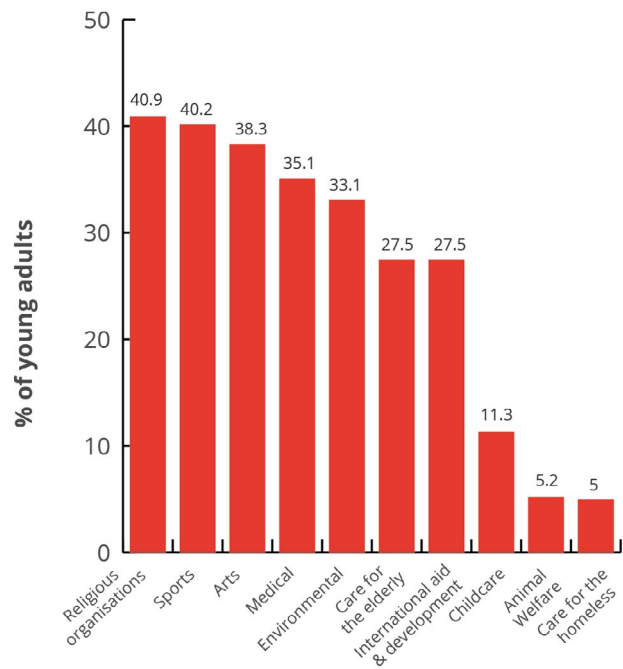


Table 2.2 shows how each charity ‘type’ ranked in terms of popularity between the 15-24 and 25+ age groups, side-by-side.

The findings echo those of the NCVO (2012): ‘sports’ and ‘arts’ charities are ranked near the bottom, whilst ‘care for the elderly’ and ‘international aid & development’ are both found near the middle. Assuming that people falling outside the young adult category are more likely to currently have children, it is notable that childcare charities are ranked 7th within this age group, but 3rd with younger adults.

The shift between the ranking of ‘environmental’ and ‘medical’ between the two age categories is also interesting: both are ranked joint-sixth with young adults, and joint-first with others. This positive correlation between popularity of medical charities and respondents’ age is perhaps reflected by the fact that older people are more closely affected by issues of health. The environmental charity category is more surprising; young adults will be increasingly affected by environmental issues over their lifetimes, but donate proportionately less to related causes than those aged 25+.

Young Adults' Ranking		Aged 25+ Ranking	
Rank	Sector	Rank	Sector
1	Care for the homeless	1	Care for the homeless
2	Animal welfare	1	Environmental
3	Childcare	1	Medical
4	International aid & development	4	International aid & development
5	Care for the elderly	5	Care for the elderly
6	Environmental	6	Animal welfare
6	Medical	7	Childcare
8	Arts	8	Arts
9	Sports	9	Sports
10	Religious organisations	10	Religious organisations

TABLE 2.2

Section 3

How being a student affects charitable giving

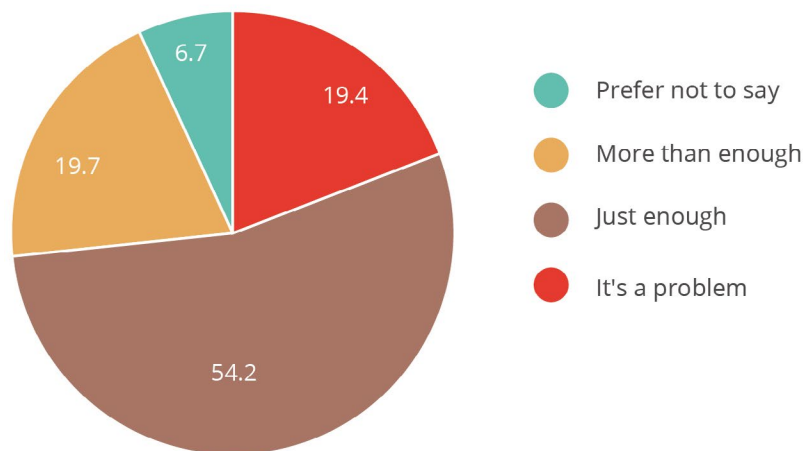
Despite primarily focussing on the differences between the charitable donations of young adults and non-young adults, the survey also included a subset of questions for students only. As students are generally considered to have less disposable income, we wanted to see whether this affected the ways in which they interact with charities.

Barriers to giving

Amongst students in higher education, especially those living away from home, there are increased financial pressures to contend with.

We asked the students who took part in our survey how they felt about their financial situation. The pie chart below graphically displays the results.

How students feel about their incomes



The findings from Section 2 make more sense in the context of these results. If only **19.7% of students feel that they have ‘more than enough’ money**, it is clear to see why 85% of young adults felt it was important to support charities, but their mean donation was just above half that of the respondents aged 25+.

When we look at the attitudinal questions from Section 2 and apply them to **students only**, the results provide a much more positive outlook: **80.5% of students either “agreed” or “strongly agreed”** that they see themselves giving more to charity in 10 years time.

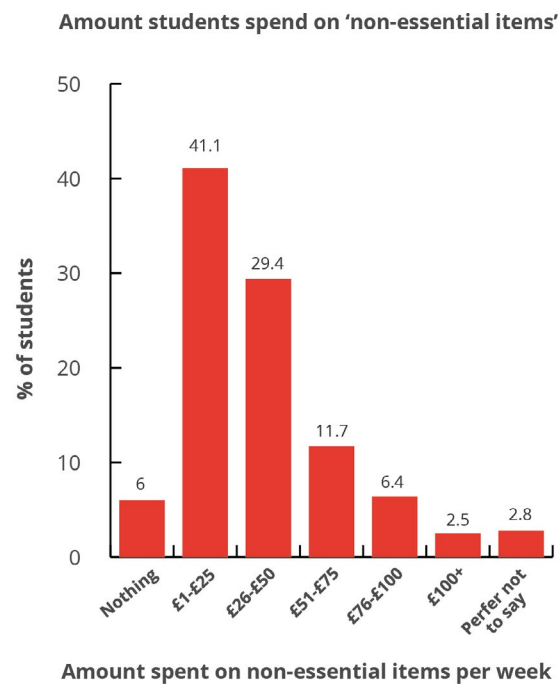
	Working full time	Working part time	Not in work or N/A
Student	11.3%	36.7%	51.9%
Non-student	62.2%	19.6%	18.2%

TABLE 3.1

To further understand why students donate so little, we asked them how much they spend each week on “non-essential items”. We classified non-essentials as being the expenditure after rent, utility bills and food has been accounted for.

24% of students said they give to charity either “at least once a week” or “at least once a month”. Given the financial situation of students (shown in the pie chart, above), this result is impressive. The same metric applied to ‘non-students’ (82% of whom are in work) provides another interesting statistic - 34% give to charity over the same time period; only a 10% increase compared to students (where only 48% are in work). Table 3.1 shows the number of students and non-students in full-time, part-time and not in work.

To further understand why students donate less than the population average, we asked them how much they spend each week on “non-essential items”. We classified non-essentials as being the expenditure after rent, utility bills and food has been accounted for.



Our results show that 77% of students spend up to £50 a week.

The chart above matches our expectations from previous findings in this paper. The number of students who spend more than £50 a week on non-essential items amounts to 20.6%, perhaps aligning with the 19.7% that said they have 'more than enough' money to live on per week. Furthermore, these respondents may correspond with the 24% who donate on a weekly or monthly basis. It seems logical that approximately the same number of students who feel most comfortable with their financial situation also have the most money to spend per week on non-essential items. It also seems fitting that this number roughly matches the amount of students who donate most often. Our research has found that there is a significant positive correlation between how much students spend on non-essentials per week and how often they give to charity ($p < 0.05$)

Interestingly, there was no significant correlation between how students qualitatively self-report their financial situation and how often they give to charity. We discovered that 74% of those who said they have "more than enough" to spend, spend no more than £50 per week. This suggests that, although many students spend a low amount on non-essentials, they don't deem it to be problematic.

This is a notable finding: a student's perception of their own wealth appears not to influence or correlate with how charitable they are. However, a student's actual wealth (based on weekly non-essential expenditure) does correlate with frequency of donations. This suggests that the decision to donate money to charity is dictated by existing behavioural patterns, rather than one's self-perceived ability to donate.

Section 4

Connecting with the lost audience: charities and their online presence

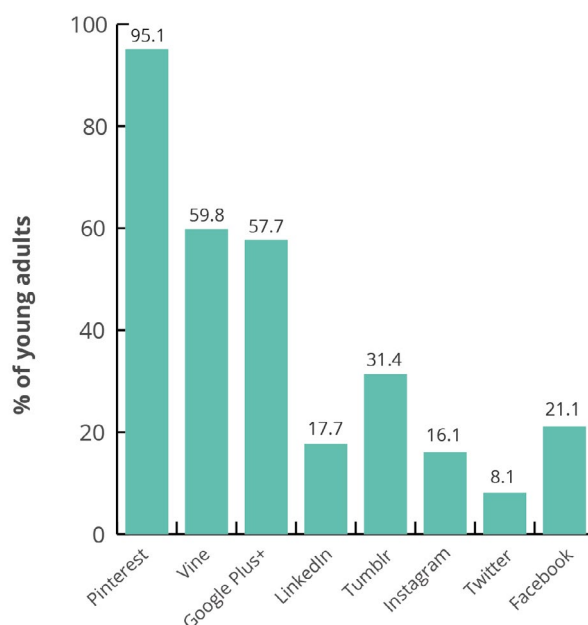
According to a [2015 ONS report](#)⁸:

- 96% of young adults (classified as 16-24) access the internet 'on the go', via a mobile device. The average for adults was 74%, with those over the age of 65% being 29%.
- 16-24 year olds are most likely to engage in online activities that involve recreation, such as social media (92%), and rank the second highest age group for 'reading online newspapers/magazines'.
- 90% of 16-24 year olds make purchases online.

It is clear from the ONS research, and from our own, that young adults are very active online. As a result, we asked the young adults that took part in our survey a series of questions about whether - and how - charities form part of their online experience.

53.8% of young adults said they had donated to charities **online** in the past year, compared to **84.8%** of those aged 25+. **91% of both those aged under and over 25** stated that they use social media regularly. This underlines industry best practice: if charities are going to successfully raise awareness and money online, a coherent social media strategy is more important than ever! The pie chart below shows the social media sites used by our respondents, when we asked them which of the following social media sites they used.

% of respondents who use these social media sites



The survey was also designed to measure how the online presence of charities affects our online decisions. We asked two questions that would measure this:

When charities are present on social media, does this prompt you to learn more about their causes or donate?

33% of young adults said yes, 45% **agreed said sometimes.**

33% of respondents aged 25+ said **yes, 54%** said **sometimes.**

Charities should not underestimate these figures: given that 78% of young adults and 87% of adults aged 25+ regularly use social media, the potential for supporter engagement is huge. If a charity's Facebook post was to be shared online by 100 people, and assuming each sharer had the Facebook average of 338 friends (Pew Research, 2014), this post would reach up to 33,800 people. Out of these, 11,154 would be prompted to learn more or donate, with a further 15,210 indicating that they may do so.

In the past year, have you shared or posted about a charity on social media?

48% of young adults **said yes.**

87% of respondents aged 25+ said **said yes.**

As long as people share or post about charities on social media, the messages of charities are reaching more and more people: a charity's presence on social media doesn't have to come directly from the charity itself. Somebody could share the post of a charity, or write about their causes. All of this raises the charity's online presence and, subsequently, awareness of their cause and the potential for donations.

"When my friends post about charities online I feel more inclined to donate to charity or learn more about them."

58% of young adults **agreed**

76% of respondents aged 25+ **agreed**

Young adults: 17.1% **did not agree**

Adults aged 25+: 11% **did not agree**

It appears that a charity campaign on social media will have more of an effect when it is endorsed by a user's online community. Recall that only 33% of participants said that they feel more inclined to donate or learn more about a charity when a charity is present on social media - what a difference it makes when friends share updates involving charities!

As evidence has suggested, young adults are especially active online, but social media has captured the attention of other age ranges as well. In 2012, according to the [ONS](#)⁹ Britain recorded the second highest level of social media usage in Europe. In the study, internet usage was split into 17 different categories, and 16-24 year olds ranked the highest age group for 6 of them; one of those being social media. One of the biggest challenges currently facing charities is standing out in a saturated and busy online marketplace: everybody wants to be responsible for the next Ice Bucket Challenge. However, the importance of being noticed by an online, social audience has never been clearer. With 90% of people aged 16-24 making online purchases in 2015, the potential exists for this demography to be further engaged with charities online.

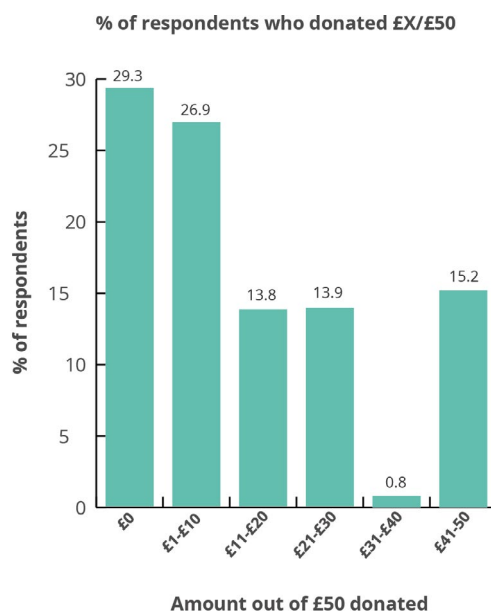
Section 5

The 'Hypothetical Money' Test

The final section of our survey measured our respondents' generosity.

Upon completing the survey, participants had the opportunity to enter into a £50 prize draw. If they chose to enter the prize draw, they were asked whether they would like to donate "some or all of this amount" to charity. Those who chose to do so were then asked to specify any donation amount between £0-£50, and the charity they'd like to donate to. Those that opted not to donate any of their potential winnings to charity were still entered for the prize draw, and their hypothetical donation amount marked as £0.

The bar chart below shows the frequency with which bands of donation amounts were selected by respondents.



The average donation amount from the '£50 prize draw' question was **£16.52**.

Although the most common category was for people to keep all of the prize money themselves (£0 donation), 70.7% of respondents who entered the prize draw chose to donate some amount to charity. Another surprising, yet promising, result is that the highest donation band, £41-£50, was the third most common!

We measured the results of this question alongside a question asked mid-way through the survey:

"Imagine that you find £100 cash that you had forgotten about inside your coat pocket. How much of this would you typically use to support a charity?"

Although research participant behaviour is affected by the very act of research - the so-called Hawthorne Effect - a bivariate correlation of the two variables (hypothetical donation and actual donation) indicated a strong positive correlation ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that participants' responses to the question about donating their prize money largely reflect their answers to a vignettised scenario presented to them at an earlier stage.

Of those who said they would donate £0 to the 'coat pocket' question, only 43.8% actually chose to donate none of the £50 prize draw money

Of those who said they would donate between 1%-19% of the 'coat pocket money', nearly a third (32.2%) of them actually chose to donate more than 50% of the prize draw money.

Similarly, of those that said they would part with between 20%-39% out of the 'coat pocket' money, 78.6% were, proportionately, at least as generous in their prize money donation.

Despite the highest donation band accounting for the third highest share of responses to the 'prize draw' question, only 4.6% of respondents claimed that they would donate more than 40% out the hypothetical 'coat pocket money' to charity. In both measures of generosity, non-students donated more to charity ($p < 0.05$).

As can be seen from the data above, people are generally more generous than they self-report to be. However, as mentioned above, their answers may have been influenced given the nature and topic of the survey. Despite this, we found a significant positive correlation between how much money people claim they would donate out of the hypothetical £100 and how much they chose to donate out of the real £50, indicating that the two variables are largely comparable, and the Hawthorne Effect did not unduly affect results.

Section 6

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to aid charities in understanding some of their youngest users' attitudes and behaviours more fully, and therefore allow them to develop stronger online relationships with supporters. Although some of the findings presented above reflect existing knowledge - young adults donate less than the average UK adult, and have a larger social media presence, for example - the focus here is to ensure that charities have tangible ways to better connect with young adults, ensuring both awareness in the short term and sustainability in the long term.

The survey was also designed to measure the effect of student status on charitable behaviour. Whilst at university, students focus their academic attention on preparing for later life. Our research finds students to be, for the most part, reluctant to spend their income on regular charity donations. This, clearly, is a pattern which needs to change: although some of our findings reflect that charitable actions may be partly dependent on disposable income, there are also indications that students and young adults are less attitudinally engaged with charities, on- and off-line.

A charity's online presence has become a pre-requisite for broader success - whether that be in terms of increasing revenue or raising awareness. Potential donors are more likely to donate and connect with charities online when their friends do, like a domino effect. Our research suggests that online charity campaigns, such as the Ice Bucket Challenge, work best when people can get involved with their friends. If it captures the imagination and people find fundraising enjoyable, social media can help spread campaigns to higher numbers of people. We also found that charity and fundraising is not prioritised as highly among younger adults as it is by those aged 25 and above. Future research should focus on the reasons for this by triangulating this survey with in-depth, qualitative analysis.

Our research also indicates that students spend a relatively low amount per week, yet don't regard this as problematic. This apparent divergence between not seeing their income as problematic yet feeling unable to give to charity is potentially the biggest problem facing charities in relation to the next generation of potential donors.

In order to gauge whether this disconnect between perceived wealth and actuated charitableness in young adults, future research should also adopt a longitudinal approach. By studying the same cohort in future years, it would be possible to gauge whether the attitudinal and behavioural traits which characterise millennials are a result of being within their current age bracket and that they'd subsequently 'grow out of', or whether these findings are typical only of this cohort and will continue to characterise this nine-year age bracket. The answer to this question would

tangibly change the charity sector's approach to engaging future donors. Either way, based on the findings in this report, charities must push to be recognised as necessary, affordable and worthwhile recipients of donors' money at an earlier stage in a potential donor's life. The impact of engaging a 16-year-old with a charity is potentially as far reaching as decades of volunteering, social sharing and donations.

URLs

¹<http://www.growinggiving.org.uk/assets/files/GUG-PART-Web.pdf>

²<http://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac15/government/>

³<https://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-publications/caf-ukgiving2014>

⁴<https://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-publications/caf-ukgiving2014>

⁵<http://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac12/what-are-the-main-trends-in-charitable-giving/>

⁶<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/rdit2/internet-access---households-and-individuals/social-networking--the-uk-as-a-leader-in-europe/sty-social-networking-2012.html>

⁷<http://karlan.yale.edu/fieldexperiments/papers/00102.pdf>

⁸<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/rdit2/internet-access---households-and-individuals/2015/stb-ia-2015.html>

⁹<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/rdit2/internet-access---households-and-individuals/social-networking--the-uk-as-a-leader-in-europe/sty-social-networking-2012.html>