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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Donor inspiration in nonprofit management: Conceptualization and measurement in a peer-to-peer context

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Abstract

Drawing on previous conceptualizations of inspiration and the motivational theory of role modeling, this study reports on the development and testing of a donor inspiration framework in a peer-to-peer giving context. This framework proposes that individuals become inspired by a source, most likely peer fundraisers, to donate for a particular social cause. Based on observable donor data ($N = 8697$) that were scraped from the platform of a large peer-to-peer fundraising campaign, the results confirm that donor inspiration is a driver of donation behavior. The authors find that the peer fundraisers, the social cause, or a combination can function as the source of inspiration. The findings offer an initial conceptualization for donor inspiration, with concrete implications on donor recruiting strategies, and the design and implementation of peer-to-peer campaigns.

KEYWORDS

donor inspiration, fundraiser, motivational theory of role modeling, peer-to-peer giving, web scraping

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1 | INTRODUCTION

“You are such an inspiration for a lot of people and I am glad that I am able to join you for this worthy cause.” This statement, posted on the donation platform of an online peer-to-peer fundraising campaign, is directed from a donor to a fundraiser. As this example illustrates, fundraisers can be an inspiration for potential donors to start donating to a certain cause. In nonprofit research, studies on motivational factors driving donation behavior have a long tradition (Bagozzi & Moore, 1994; Beldad et al., 2014; Dawson, 1988; Konrath & Handy, 2018; Sargeant, 2001). A well-accepted proposition in the literature is that at least eight mechanisms exist that explain why individuals donate money (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011). These mechanisms include awareness of need, cost and benefits, altruism, reputation, psychological benefits, values, efficacy, and solicitation. This study is strongly related to the area of solicitation, referring to the mere act of being asked for a donation. Distinct ways of soliciting donors exist, for example, sending a fundraising letter or realizing a marketing campaign (Wang et al., 2023). However, a more indirect facet of solicitation, namely being inspired by peer fundraisers to donate, has rarely been studied. Therefore, we are positioning our donor inspiration study as a specific facet of solicitation, as it contributes to the overall understanding of why solicitation leads to donation behavior.

Donor inspiration is a rather new construct in nonprofit and donor management research. After carefully reviewing the nonprofit literature, we identified only two studies that used inspiration to some extent. Liang et al. (2016) highlight the role of inspiration in donation advertisements and point out that inspiration and positive emotions are interconnected. In a volunteering context, Nordstrom et al. (2022) investigated the actions and programs of a foundation and its inspirational effects on volunteerism. We concluded that donor inspiration is an interesting but insufficiently developed concept. It has high practical relevance because it could help nonprofit organizations attract new donors or volunteers, thereby securing resources to fulfill their mission. Nevertheless, more theoretical and empirical knowledge is needed to better understand the donor inspiration construct and its potential outcomes in various nonprofit contexts.

Considering this background, our first research aim is to conceptualize donor inspiration and establish its importance in nonprofit management research, building our theoretical foundation mainly on research from (social) psychology. In particular, Thrash and Elliot (2004), Thrash, Elliot, et al. (2010), Thrash, Maruskin, et al. (2010), and Thrash et al. (2014) introduced inspiration as a psychological construct with two processes, “inspired-by” and “inspired-to”. We follow their approach and conceptualize our own donor inspiration framework. Moreover, we built on the motivational theory of role modeling (Morgenroth et al., 2015), which states that role models are a source of inspiration for others. In the peer-to-peer context, we propose that peer fundraisers function as role models by providing an individual with the idea to donate money (Figgins et al., 2016).

The second aim of this study is to provide empirical evidence on the link between donor inspiration and donation behavior. Thereby, we build on previous studies, mainly from marketing (Böttger et al., 2017; Chopra et al., 2021; Das et al., 2022; Izogo & Mpinganjira, 2020). In particular, the study by Böttger et al. (2017) contributed to a better understanding of the measurement of customer inspiration by developing and validating a two-component scale in different buying contexts, finally confirming 10 items for the measurement. Moreover, Das et al. (2022) conducted a survey among 396 masstige luxury car buyers in India and confirmed that inspiration is associated positively with the cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement of potential buyers.

Besides psychology and marketing, inspiration is found in the literature of other disciplines, for example, entrepreneur management (Wartiovaara et al., 2019), tourism (Liu et al., 2017), health (Robinson & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2020), or art (Welke et al., 2021). However, most of these studies were survey-based, and we are not aware of any empirical inspiration study that uses observable data as we intend to do.

To achieve both aims, we decided to conduct our study in a peer-to-peer campaign context, wherein “private individuals raise donations in their social network on behalf of a charity” (Chapman et al., 2019, p. 573), for two reasons. First, we believe that the peer-to-peer context facilitates greater visibility of the inspirational effect as the peer fundraiser and the potential donors share the same social network and communicate about their individual reasons to get engaged via an online platform. Second, we were able to collect observable real campaign data of a large-scale peer-to-peer fundraising campaign. We use the peer-to-peer partnership campaign of LesMills, a global fitness company, and UNICEF, as our research context. In this campaign, the fitness instructors of Les Mills function as peer fundraisers and inspire their social network to support the social mission of “clean water in Africa” organized via the “WorkoutForWater” peer-to-peer platform (workoutforwater.org). We collected a large dataset with information on 8697 donation transactions.

To summarize, our study contributes to the literature in at least three ways: (1) The article theorizes the role of donor inspiration within the field of nonprofit fundraising studies, thereby augmenting the literature on motivational giving mechanisms. (2) To the best of our knowledge, the study is one of the very few that empirically test donor inspiration based on a large observable data set, and therefore, we enrich academic knowledge with real campaign data. (3) We provide knowledge on inspiration as a driver of donation in the peer-to-peer fundraising context. Thus, our study contributes toward a more comprehensive understanding of relevant factors that potentially influence the giving behavior of peers, and our empirical findings will help nonprofit managers to advance their donor relationship management.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND, FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 | Motivational theory of role modeling, inspiration as a construct, and definitions

Our work adopted the motivational theory of role modeling by Morgenroth et al. (2015) as its key theoretical foundation and extended its fundamental arguments to a peer-to-peer fundraising context. Overall, the theory explains how individuals who are perceived as role models within a relationship or network influence and motivate others. Hu et al. (2020, p. 192) define role models as “individuals who exert a positive social influence on role aspirants.” Moreover, psychological literature suggests that a role model can be anyone, from a close friend or family member, characterized by a high level of personal interactions, to a movie star, celebrity, or other influencers with looser interactions in an offline or online environment (Ruvio et al., 2013).

According to the theory, three distinct forms of how a role model motivates their role aspirants should be differentiated (Morgenroth et al., 2015). First, role models motivate others through their own behaviors. In this form, the role model demonstrates to the role aspirants how a certain goal can be achieved (for example, female mentors for women in engineering

TABLE 1 Selected definitions of inspiration.

Authors	Definition	Core concept
Oxford English Dictionary; Simpson and Weiner (1989), adopted by Thrash and Elliot (2003)	“A breathing in or infusion of some ideas, purpose, etc. into the mind; the suggestion, awakening, or creation of some feeling or impulse, especially of an exalted kind” (p. 1036)	Inspiration
Chadborn and Reysen (2018); adapted from Arieti (1976)	“Inspiration acts as a motivational concept, in which inspiration is evoked (generated) from a source and a person then finds some means to transmit an idea and is driven to produce some creative outcome as a result” (p. 625)	Inspiration
Oleynick et al. (2014)	“Inspiration is a motivational state that compels individuals to bring ideas into fruition” (p. 1) “Inspiration is often elicited when a creator appraises his or her idea as creative, and it is posited to motivate actualization of the idea in the form of a product that is likewise appraised (by its creator and perhaps others) as creative” (p. 4)	Creative Inspiration
Definition proposed in this study	“Donor inspiration is a two-component psychological process between an idea generator, most often a fundraiser, a social project, or nonprofit organization, and a (potential) donor, that gives an individual the idea to support something new (inspired-by) and thus, triggers and intensifies the feeling to donate (inspired-to)”	Donor Inspiration

jobs; Dennehy & Dasgupta, 2017). The second form refers to role models who represent what is possible. Role models show the role aspirant the type of success they can achieve in the future. A well-known and often cited example within role model literature is Barack Obama. The third form, the focus of our study, is that role models are a source of inspiration. For example, Paice et al. (2002) stated that “excellent role models will always inspire” (p. 707).

Considering this theoretical background, a vital first step in conceptualizing donor inspiration is to define the term more precisely. Table 1 shows several selected definitions of inspiration in an overview. Previous definitions have moved from a rather broad and fragmented enumeration of typical characteristics to a clearer statement that inspiration is a motivational concept.

However, none of the existing definitions explicitly highlight the two-process logic by Thrash and Elliot (2004), Thrash, Elliot, et al. (2010), Thrash, Maruskin, et al. (2010), and we are unaware of any other study that defines donor inspiration. In their first study from the year 2003, the authors characterize inspiration by three elements: evocation, motivation, and transcendence (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, p. 885). In the following studies, the authors developed their conceptualizations further and distinguished two processes: inspired-by and inspired-to. The

inspired-by process involves the “appreciation of and accommodation to the perceived intrinsic value of the evocative object” (Thrash, Elliot, et al., 2010, p. 489). The inspired-to process involves an individual’s “motivation to transmit (for example, express, actualize, or imitate)” (p. 489). Other studies have provided empirical support for the two-component logic of inspiration (Böttger et al., 2017; Chopra et al., 2021; Izogo & Mpinganjira, 2020; Liang et al., 2016; Sheng et al., 2020); we adopted the logic for our own definition and conceptualization of donor inspiration.

We define the term donor inspiration as a two-component psychological process between an idea generator, most often a fundraiser, social project, or nonprofit organization, and a (potential) donor, that gives an individual the idea to support something new (inspired-by) and, thus, triggers and intensifies the feeling to donate (inspired-to).

2.2 | Donor inspiration framework and hypotheses

Figure 1 shows the donor inspiration framework in an overview. In our own conceptualization of donor inspiration, we adopt the two-process logic and apply it to the peer-to-peer context.

First, the inspired-by process is an intrinsic motivational state that is not autonomously initiated but needs to be activated by an external idea generator, in our framework the cause, the peer fundraiser or a combination of both (Chapman et al., 2019; van de Ven et al., 2019; Wartiovaara et al., 2019). For example, imagine you are sitting with your friends in a restaurant and a homeless person sits outside in front of the entrance. A group of people around your age sit at the table next to yours and one of them walks out and donates their own meal (a pizza) to the homeless person. You may see this person as your role model and get inspired by them to donate your meal the next time you are in a similar situation. In this example, inspired-by is naturally evoked.

Second, the inspired-to process is the motivational component related to the intrinsic pursuit to realize an inspired idea, in this case, donating. The intensity of feeling inspired can vary depending on the person experiencing inspiration (Sheng et al., 2020). In Figure 1, we conceptualize a continuum from low to high inspirational intensity.

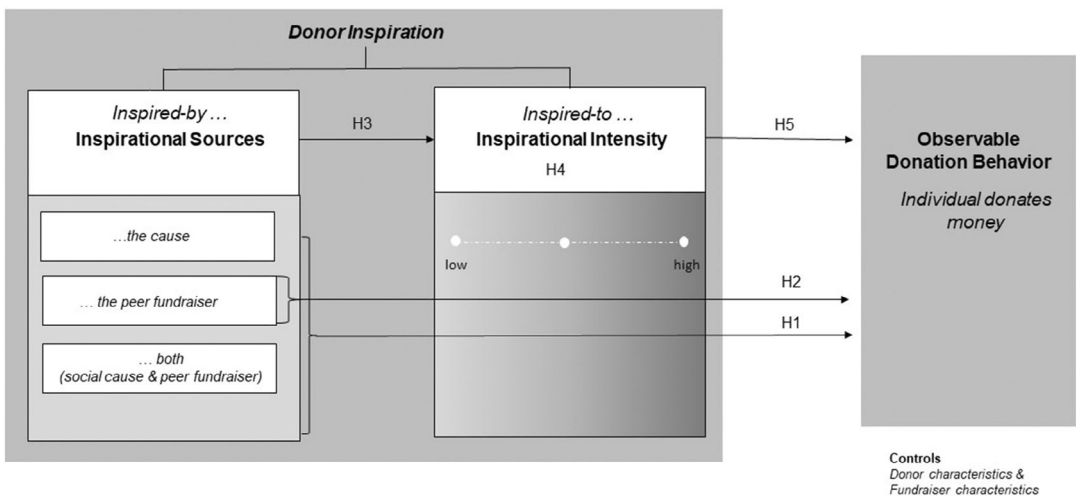


FIGURE 1 The donor inspiration framework.

However, there is still a lack of clarity regarding the differences and similarities of the inspired-to process in comparison to related constructs such as intention to donate, donor loyalty, and donor retention (Beldad et al., 2014; Bennett & Barkensjo, 2005; Sargeant & Woodliffe, 2007). In their work on supporter loyalty, Wymer and Rundle-Thiele (2016) explain in more detail why loyalty and retention (positive word-of-mouth, donate again) should be seen as distinct constructs, which we do not repeat in depth here. However, they conceptualize supporter loyalty as a psychological, affective antecedent construct that is related positively to donation behavior. In our view, it is reasonable to believe that the inspired-to process is quite similar to supporter loyalty but at the same time differs in its focus on the transformation of nondonors to donors and not on established donor relationships, as in supporter loyalty. Nevertheless, more nonprofit studies comparing these constructs are needed. The only reason we did not integrate intention to donate into our own framework is that this study is based on observable data only, and it was not something we were able to operationalize with our data.

In the following subsections, we explain the development of our five hypotheses in more detail.

2.2.1 | Inspirational sources

Previous studies have demonstrated that it is very likely that some inspirational sources work better for certain individuals, in certain situations or contexts (Das et al., 2022; Izogo & Mpinganjira, 2020). For example, in an online peer giving context, Chapman et al. (2019) found the solicitation of the peer fundraiser to be the main driver of peer donation, and the cause or the nonprofit organization to be secondary. Thus, we conceptualize in Figure 1 the existence of three different sources of inspiration within peer-to-peer fundraising campaigns. First, individuals are inspired by the cause to donate money. It is very well accepted and often confirmed in traditional fundraising campaigns, that individuals are more likely to donate when they are emotionally touched by the social cause the campaign aims to support (Liang et al., 2016). Thus, the potential donor is inspired by the social cause. Second, individuals are inspired by the peer fundraiser to donate money. In line with motivational theory of role modeling (Morgenroth et al., 2015), we argue that when peer fundraisers make donation behavior seem desirable, they can inspire potential donors to adopt donation behavior. Consequently, the source of inspiration could also be the direct solicitation by a peer fundraiser (Castillo et al., 2014; Chapman et al., 2019; Meer, 2011; Scharf & Smith, 2016). Third, we argue that donor inspiration could also be based on both factors, a mix of different sources/motives. This argument is congruent with the well-accepted notion that pure altruism rarely exists. A logical conclusion is that a combination of different giving mechanisms evokes the motivation to donate (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Konrath & Handy, 2018). Thus, the first hypothesis is:

H1. *The type of inspirational source/s (peer fundraiser or cause, or both) makes a difference in triggering donation behavior.*

2.2.2 | Inspired-by the peer fundraiser

We argue that due to the personal connection between a peer fundraiser and potential donor, donor inspiration will have a stronger effect on donation behavior when the source of

inspiration is the peer fundraiser rather than the cause (Chapman et al., 2019). This is congruent with the existing body of literature that highlights the importance of the relationship between the peer fundraiser and donor in terms of peer donation behavior (Meer, 2011; Scharf & Smith, 2016; Smith et al., 2015). Nonprofit researchers have, for example, shared empirical evidence that fundraisers are a key determinant for fundraising success (Breeze, 2017; Breeze & Jollymore, 2017). In an online peer-to-peer charity context, Chapman et al. (2019) show that donations are more influenced by peer fundraisers than any other actions, and call this the “champion effect”. Peer fundraisers often inspire their peers to become engaged in a specific social cause, which the latter normally would neither be interested in nor have heard of before. Furthermore, the motivational theory of role modeling highlights personal relationships of individuals as the main trigger for inspiration and the subsequent behavior (Morgenroth et al., 2015).

However, we acknowledge that there are several other individual characteristics of the peer fundraiser that can trigger donation behavior, such as their personality (Meer, 2011), appearance on the campaign platform (Chapman et al., 2019; Priante et al., 2021), or trustworthiness (Breeze & Jollymore, 2017). However, we are limited to the information provided on the campaign webpage. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H2. *Peer fundraisers, as a source of inspiration, are more inspiring than the social cause in triggering donation behavior.*

2.2.3 | Two-process logic of inspiration

Following the two-process logic of inspiration explained earlier, both processes of donor inspiration are required and closely linked (Thrash, Elliot, et al., 2010). An external source evokes the donor’s idea of supporting a peer, next the donor needs to transit into a stage in that the feeling of realizing a donation is triggered. Conceptualizing a path between inspired-by and inspired-to is well accepted in inspiration studies, and empirically confirmed (Böttger et al., 2017; Izogo & Mpinganjira, 2020). Thus, we hypothesize that donor inspiration is a two-process construct, and:

H3. *The inspired-by process is positively related to the inspired-to process of donor inspiration.*

2.2.4 | Inspired-to

Further, theoretical developments propose the inspired-to process as mediating the relationship between inspired-by and the actual behavior (Böttger et al., 2017; Thrash, Maruskin, et al., 2010). Izogo and Mpinganjira (2020) provide empirical evidence for this in a social media context. Following previous conceptualizations, the inspired-to process can be regarded as the motivational process that links the inspiration evoked by a source to actual behavior. While being inspired-by a source can lead to emotions like admiration (van de Ven et al., 2019), this does not lead to actual action if the individual does not feel the inner pursuit to realize the inspired behavior. Furthermore, Liang et al. (2016) empirically determined that inspiration functions as mediator in the relationship between different emotions in donation

advertisements and the effectiveness of the advertisements. Accordingly, we assume that the two stages are causally linked and the inspired-to stage mediates the relationship between the inspired-by-stage and the donation outcome. We hypothesize:

H4. *Inspired-to mediates the relationship between inspired-by and donation behavior.*

2.2.5 | Donation behavior

Previous studies point out that the consequences of inspiration can be behavioral, emotional, and attitudinal in nature (Das et al., 2022; Izogo & Mpinganjira, 2020; Sheng et al., 2020). While behavioral consequences refer to the actual realization of the inspired idea (for example, donating), emotional consequences are those affective responses that are triggered by inspiration, such as delight or happiness (Das et al., 2022; Straume & Vittersø, 2012). In addition, attitudinal consequences refer to evaluative judgments that are more resilient than emotions, such as well-being (Thrash, Elliot, et al., 2010), donor satisfaction, or donor loyalty. These are found to be particularly important for the donor experience (Beldad et al., 2014; Bennett, 2012). We agree with this notion; however, in the conceptualization, we focus on behavioral consequences as the intended outcome for nonprofit organizations. Behavioral consequences largely depend on the content of the inspired goal (Milyavskaya et al., 2012). In the peer-to-peer context, we believe that donor inspiration will most likely lead to donation behavior. We argue that donations are driven by the degree of inspiration a donor perceives. We hypothesize:

H5. *The higher the inspired-to feeling by the donor the greater observable donation behavior.*

3 | METHOD

3.1 | Research context

This study is part of a large empirical project on peer-to-peer giving. In this article, we take the donor perspective and examine in detail the role of donor inspiration in the context of a worldwide peer-to-peer fundraising campaign. The campaign we focus on is a collaboration between a for-profit fitness company (LesMills) and UNICEF. Together, they initiated the campaign to ensure children access to clean and potable water in Africa. To reach this goal, they invited about 140,000 fitness instructors to engage in the campaign as peer fundraisers by using their social networks to inspire donations. They could set up an individual fundraising page on the official campaign's donation platform (see Appendix A). In addition, donors could leave a statement along with their donation.

3.2 | Data collection and sample

For data collection, we programmed a python-based web scraper (Thomas & Mathur, 2019) to assess observable behavioral data on the official campaign platform, spanning the period

between the start of the campaign in March 2019 until January 2021. Based on the scraped data, we construed a data set, where each observation corresponded to a donation transaction. For each donation, the data contained information about individual characteristics of the donor, an individual donor inspiration score, the source that triggered the inspiration, and the observable donation amount. We cross-checked the extracted data by generating a random sample of peer donors and manually verifying the information.

Overall, we obtained data on 10,128 transactions. We cleaned the data to exclude cases biasing the results. First, we excluded donations that were made by the peer fundraiser themselves on their own fundraising page ($N = 726$). Second, we excluded donations that were automated donations made by the national trainer of LesMills to get the peer fundraisers started ($N = 340$). Third, we excluded transactions that were made by donation communities or companies to ensure that only individual donation behavior is considered ($N = 399$). Our final sample consists of information on 8697 donation transactions.

Additionally, 3494 donors wrote a verbal statement accompanying their donation, which contained additional information on what triggered their donation, whereas 5203 did not; we refer to them as two subsamples. Table 2 gives an overview of the sample characteristics of the overall sample ($N = 8697$), and the two subsamples. Within the overall sample, we identified 4574 (52.6%) transactions made by female donors, 2522 (28.9%) by male donors, and 1601 (18.4%) donations are undefined by sex or anonymous donations. We verified donor's sex using a name algorithm (Blevins & Mullen, 2015), based on which we classified the sample as male and female donors. This algorithm uses statistical methods to predict the gender of a name based on patterns found in existing gender-labeled datasets. However, gender-neutral names can cause inaccuracy. This is a methodological limitation. In terms of the currency of the donation, based on the currency zone each donor is located in, more than half of the donations (59.8%) were made in US Dollars, followed by 1040 donations (12.0%) in New Zealand Dollars,

TABLE 2 Sample characteristics.

Variables	Overall sample N = 8697	Subsample 1 (leaving a comment) N = 3494	Subsample 2 (leaving no comment) N = 5203
Transactions made by			
Female	4574 (52.6%)	2020 (57.8%)	2554 (49.1%)
Male	2522 (28.9%)	1036 (29.7%)	1486 (28.6%)
Undefined sex, anonymous	1601 (18.4%)	438 (12.5%)	1163 (22.4%)
Currency zone			
USA (USD)	5196 (59.8%)	1983 (56.8%)	3213 (61.8%)
New Zealand (NZD)	1040 (12.0%)	454 (13.0%)	586 (11.3%)
United Kingdom (GBP)	699 (8.0%)	403 (11.5%)	296 (5.7%)
Europe (EUR)	1016 (11.7%)	313 (9.0%)	703 (13.5%)
Canada (CAD)	250 (2.9%)	125 (3.6%)	125 (2.4%)
Australia (AUD)	493 (5.7%)	215 (6.2%)	278 (5.3%)
Brazil (BRL)	3 (0.0%)	1 (0.0%)	2 (0.0%)

1016 (11.7%) in Euro, and 699 (8.0%) in Pound Sterling (UK), The remaining donations were made in either Australian or Canadian Dollars.

3.3 | Measurements

A complete list of all measures is provided in Appendix B. Given the observable nature of our data, we used observable single items to measure our variables.

3.3.1 | Donation

We measured donation behavior according to the donation amount given by an individual displayed on the platform. All donations are converted to USD to ensure comparability. Our overall sample donated a total of USD 307857.29. The descriptive results in Table 3 show that the average donation amount within the sample of donors who left a comment is USD 37.99 (Median USD 25.00). The subsample that left no comment displays a lower average donation amount of USD 33.66 (Median USD 23.80). Because of the non-normal distribution of the error terms of the donation behavior variable, we log-transformed it for some of our analysis.

3.3.2 | Donor inspiration

Distinct from the survey approach applied by Böttger et al. (2017) (see Appendix C), we measured donor inspiration observably based on the written comments accompanying the donors'

TABLE 3 Descriptive results.

	Subgroup left no comment	Subgroup left comment	Social cause	Peer fundraiser	Both (cause + peer fundraiser)
Source of Inspiration	-	3494	335 (9.6%)	2794 (80.0%)	365 (10.4%)
Inspiration Score M (SD)	-	1.78 (.595)	1.48 (.568)	1.78 (.603)	2.05 (.341)
Low	-	1095 (31.3%)	186 (55.5%)	896 (32.1%)	13 (3.6%)
Middle	-	2084 (59.6%)	137 (40.9%)	1625 (58.2%)	322 (88.2%)
High	-	315 (9.0%)	12 (3.6%)	273 (9.8%)	30 (8.2%)
<i>Donation amount</i>					
M (SD)	USD 33.66 (63.51)	USD 37.99 (46.15)	USD 32.54 (36.04)	USD 37.04 (44.73)	USD 50.22 (60.84)
Median	USD 23.80	USD 25.00	USD 25.00	USD 25.00	USD 29.75
Min–Max	USD 0.77 ^a – 1570.00	USD 1.00– 800.00	USD 1.00– 300.00	USD 1.00– 800.00	USD 3.60– 500.00

Abbreviations: M, Mean; SD, standard deviation.

^aAlthough donors had to donate at least 1USD/Euro, the value of 0.77 results from converting the currencies to USD.

donations (Zhao & Dale, 2019). Two independent researchers manually analyzed each written statement for what drove the donors to donate. Additionally, we checked the quality of the coding process through an automated process (for details see quality check). We accounted for the (1) source of inspiration and (2) intensity of inspiration in each of these comments ($N = 3494$).

3.3.3 | Source of inspiration

We found three different sources of inspiration in the data, which we coded as 0 = inspired by the cause, 1 = by the peer fundraisers, or 2 = inspired by both. To be able to include the categorical variable in our analysis, we created two binary variables: (1) source peer fundraisers (1 = source fundraisers, 0 = source cause or both), or (2) source both (0 = source cause or source fundraiser, 1 = source both). The possibility that the cause is the source of inspiration is the reference category in our regression model. The descriptive statistics (Table 3) show that out of the 3494 donor comments, only 335 (9.6%) comments refer to the cause (clean water for Africa) as their source of inspiration, 2794 (80.0%) comments mention the fundraisers as source of their inspiration to donate, and 365 (10.4%) attribute their donation to both the cause and fundraisers.

3.3.4 | Intensity of inspiration

We operationalized three levels of inspiration intensity: 1 = low, 2 = middle, and 3 = high donor inspiration. For example, a low intensity of inspiration is associated with comments like “you’ve got this” or “cheering for you.” A middle intensity of inspiration is typical for comments that explicitly use the term “inspiration” with no further explanation. Comments that expound on the inspiration were assessed to have a high level of inspiration intensity. An example comment is as follows: “Resilience has a name—Rachael Newsham! What a year and what a woman. Thank you for the inspiration to keep lifting that mental ‘bar’”. A list of examples for donor inspiration intensity is provided in Appendix D.

Descriptive results show that with respect to the intensity of donor inspiration, only 315 (9.0%) donor comments show what we coded as high level of inspirational content. Conversely, 2084 (59.6%) of the comments indicate a medium level of inspirational intensity, and 1095 (31.3%) a low level. Noteworthy for our purpose is the distribution of donor inspiration intensity grouped by the inspirational sources (Table 3). Transactions that were inspired by the cause show the lowest average donation ($M = 32.54$, $SD = 36.04$), followed by transactions that were inspired by the fundraisers ($M = 37.04$, $SD = 44.73$). When the comments stated that the transaction was inspired by the cause and the fundraisers, the average donation amount was clearly higher with $M = 50.22$ ($SD = 60.84$).

3.3.5 | Quality check

To ensure the quality of coding, we analyzed the comments with two researchers. To compare the agreement of the coders and account for the quality of analysis in terms of subjective bias, we first calculated the intercoder reliability (ICR). The direct agreement of two coders,

presented as percentage of agreement, is 92% for the coding of the inspiration source and 88% for the intensity of donor inspiration, both satisfactory values.

Further, we validated the findings regarding the intensity of donor inspiration by applying an unsupervised sentiment analysis using the Vader Sentiment Library (Borg & Boldt, 2020). This analysis is primarily designed to measure the polarity (positive, negative, or neutral) of a text. Therefore, each of our comments was classified as positive, negative, or neutral. Comparing the result with our hand-coded results, we find a moderate converging rate of 73.23% and a Cohens Kappa value of .384. We argue that, in our case, hand-coding performed better. The algorithm rated comments such as “Thank you” as positive, while comments like “Way to go on raising awareness for this cause. Can’t wait to see you knock out all these burpees live” were rated neutral. In terms of the source of inspiration, we are very confident that the comments are clearly attributable and no additional machine coding is needed.

3.3.6 | Controls

Besides sex and currency, we include the peer fundraiser’s reputation within the community as a control variable. While there are plenty of potential source characteristics in the donation context, we propose the personal reputation of the fundraisers as being particularly important. We based this measure on the professional job rank that the peer fundraiser achieved in their fitness career at Les Mills. We classified global representatives, national trainers, assessors, and presenters as fitness champions (1 = high perceived reputation) and all other individual peer fundraisers as regular fitness instructors (0 = as regular perceived reputation).

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Test of hypotheses

To test our hypotheses, we perform the Kruskal–Wallis H test (Table 4), regression analysis (Table 5), and mediation analysis (Table 6).

4.1.1 | Hypothesis 1 is supported by the data

We test our first hypotheses regarding the effect of the different types of inspirational sources (cause, fundraisers, or both) on the donation amount by performing the nonparametric Kruskal–Wallis H test. This test was chosen over the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with planned contrast because of its robustness in dealing with non-normal distributed data (Nwobi & Akanno, 2021) and greatly varying sample group sizes ($n_{\text{fundraisers}} = 2794$, $n_{\text{cause}} = 335$, and $n_{\text{both}} = 365$). Table 4, Panel A shows the means, standard deviations, and the number of observations for the intensity of donor inspiration and the donation amount grouped by the inspirational sources.

Based on the results of the Kruskal–Wallis H test, H_1 is supported (Table 4, Panel B). The results show that among the sources of inspiration, there is a statistically significant difference with regard to the donation amount ($\chi^2(2) = 41.37$, $p < 0.001$), such as the intensity of donor inspiration ($\chi^2(2) = 176.50$, $p < 0.001$).

TABLE 4 ANOVA results.

Panel A: Mean [SD = standard deviation] for inspiration intensity and donation behavior										
Source	Inspiration intensity					Donation behavior				
Peer fundraiser	1.78 [0.61] <i>n</i> = 2794					37.04 [44.74] <i>n</i> = 2794				
Cause	1.48 [0.57] <i>n</i> = 335					32.54 [36.04] <i>n</i> = 335				
Both	2.05 [0.34] <i>n</i> = 365					50.22 [60.84] <i>n</i> = 365				
Panel B: Kruskal–Wallis test										
Source	N	Mean rank	χ^2	Df	<i>p</i>	N	Mean rank	χ^2	Df	<i>p</i>
Peer fundraiser	2794	1744.97				2794	1734.21			
Cause	335	1297.94				335	1553.09			
Both	365	2179.48				365	2027.68			
Total	3494		176.50	2	<0.001	3494		41.37	2	<0.001
Panel C: Post hoc Dunn–Bonferroni test										
Source	<i>t</i>	SE	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	SE	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>		
Cause vs. Peer fundraiser	−447.03	50.72	−8.81	<0.001	−181.12	58.12	−3.12	<0.002		
Cause vs. Both	−881.53	66.37	−13.28	<0.001	−474.59	76.10	−6.24	<0.001		
Peer Fundraiser vs. Both	−434.51	49.52	−8.90	<0.001	−293.47	55.94	−5.25	<0.001		

Abbreviations: SD, standard deviation; SE, standard error.

4.1.2 | Hypothesis 2 is supported by the data

In line with Chapman et al. (2019), we hypothesized that peer fundraisers are more inspiring for donation behavior than the social cause in a peer-to-peer context. This hypothesis is confirmed by the Dunn–Bonferroni post hoc test (Table 4, Panel C) and the results of the regression analysis of model 3 in Table 5. Although the Kruskal–Wallis test indicates a significant difference between the sources of inspiration, we conduct the Dunn–Bonferroni post hoc test to determine pairwise which of the inspirational sources are statistically different in terms of donation behavior. The results indicate that donors who were inspired by the cause gave significantly less compared with those inspired by the fundraisers ($z = -3.12$, $p < 0.01$) or by both ($z = -6.24$, $p < 0.001$). Further, donors who were inspired by the fundraiser gave less compared with donors who were inspired by both the cause and the fundraisers ($z = -5.25$, $p < 0.001$). H_2 is further supported by the results of the regression analysis in model 3, which indicate that the source of inspiration being the peer fundraisers has a significant positive effect on the donation amount. This means that being inspired by peer fundraisers instead of the social cause leads to a significant higher donation amount ($\beta = 0.139$, $SE = 0.049$, $p < 0.001$). As anticipated, depending on the source of inspiration, different levels of inspiration and donation behavior are triggered (Izogo & Mpinganjira, 2020).

This raises the question on the donor's general willingness to give. The findings indicate that helping a cause is less inspiring to donors than helping the peer fundraiser. Indeed, peer-to-peer fundraising literature has provided empirical evidence that peer donors are driven by relational altruism (Scharf & Smith, 2016), meaning they are motivated by helping a friend but not the

TABLE 5 Regression analysis.

Inspiration intensity	Donation behavior (log)					
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Donor inspiration source: social cause (reference category)						
Peer fundraiser	0.206*** (0.020)	0.195*** (0.020)	0.139*** (0.049)	0.088*** (0.048)	0.092*** (0.047)	
Both (peer fundraiser and cause)	0.318*** (0.027)	0.299*** (0.026)	0.197*** (0.064)	0.124*** (0.063)	0.126*** (0.063)	
Inspiration				0.252*** (0.024)	0.252*** (0.024)	0.195*** (0.010)
Sex		-0.006 n.s. (0.000)			0.017** (0.000)	
Currency NZD		0.088*** (0.018)			-0.128*** (0.042)	
Currency EURO		-0.123*** (0.021)			-0.046** (0.050)	
Currency GBP		-0.008 n.s. (0.020)			-0.117*** (0.045)	
Currency AUSTR		0.071*** (0.025)			0.048** (0.059)	
Currency CAD		-0.014n.s. (0.032)			-0.041* (0.074)	
Perceived Reputation		0.117*** (0.013)			0.043* (0.030)	
Constant	0.323***	0.298	2.960	2.424	2.470	3.010
N	3494	3494	3494	3494	3494	8697
R ² /Adj.-R ²	0.054/0.054	0.091/0.088	0.021/0.020	0.082/0.081	0.112/0.109	0.038/.038
F	100.04	38.623	37.161	103.441	43.920	172.990

Note: Dependent variable "donation behavior" is log-transformed. "Source cause" is the reference category. "Currency USD" is the reference category for the currency. Regression coefficients are standardized. Standard errors are in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$, n.s. $p > 0.05$.

cause per se. Further, Meer (2011) indicates that when being requested to donate by a peer, donors are more pressured into donation, and therefore, are more likely to give a higher average donation. Lastly, our findings support the champion effect by Chapman et al. (2019), which says that potential donors are "more influenced by the champion (peer fundraisers) than by the charity" (p. 573), using different study design and measurement tools. We find donors inspired by the peer fundraisers donate significantly more compared with those inspired by the cause. However, we want to highlight that when the source of inspiration is both (the fundraisers and the cause), donors give significantly higher donation amounts compared with those being inspired by only the social cause or fundraiser, showing that a combination of both is the most effective.

TABLE 6 Mediation analysis.

Indirect effects					
Relation	Coefficients			95% CIs	
	β	partially	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Total donation amount					
Inspired-by Fundraiser→Inspired-to→Donation Behavior	0.1071	0.1256	0.0138	0.0804	0.1348
Inspired-by Both→Inspiration→Donation Behavior	0.2046	0.2400	0.0185	0.1688	0.2424

Note: $p < 0.05$. Dependent variable: Donation amount; Mediator: Inspiration; Independent Variable: Inspired-by source as categorical variable. Reference group: inspired-by cause. p values were derived by bootstrapping with 5000 samples within 95% confidence intervals.

Abbreviations: CI, Confidence Interval; LLCI, Lower Limit Confidence Interval; SE, Standard Error; ULCI, Upper Limit Confidence Interval.

4.1.3 | Hypothesis 3 is supported by the data

In model 1 of the regression analysis in Table 5, we assess the relationship between the source of inspiration (inspired-by component) and the inspiration intensity (inspired-to component). The results show that inspired-by significantly predicts inspired-to [$F(2, 3492) = 100.04$, $p < 0.001$]. Thereby, inspired-by accounts for 5% of the variance in inspired-to, which is comparably low. We expect this effect to be larger when replicating the measurement with survey data.

4.1.4 | Hypothesis 4 is supported by the data

We applied a mediation analysis when the independent variable is multicategorical (Hayes & Preacher, 2014) using the PROCESS macro by Hayes (2018) and controlling for donor and peer fundraiser characteristics. This type of mediation analysis displays relative indirect and direct effects. Therefore, the effects are interpreted relative to one of the alternative categories of the independent variable. The social cause functions as the reference group. The results of the bootstrapping procedure in Table 6 revealed a positive significant relative indirect effect for the source being the peer fundraisers ($\beta = 0.1071$, $SE = 0.0138$) and being both the cause and the peer fundraisers ($\beta = 0.2046$, $SE = 0.0185$). Applying an exponential retransformation of the coefficients, we find (relative to the reference group) those being inspired by the fundraisers donate 1.11 USD more and those being inspired by both donate 1.22 USD more as a result of the positive effect of being inspired-by a peer fundraiser or both on inspiration, which in turn increased the donation behavior. We also confirm the direct effect of inspired-by, indicating the likelihood of other influencing factors that need to be taken into consideration. Most causal effects operate through more than one mediator (Hayes & Rockwood, 2017).

4.1.5 | Hypothesis 5 is supported by the data

The results in Table 5, model 5, show a positive significant effect of inspiration on donation behavior, meaning the higher the inspiration of a donor, the higher the observable amount

donated ($\beta = 0.252$, $SE = 0.02$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, we find inspiration to be the strongest predictor in model 5. In terms of predictive validity, the results highlight that the inclusion of inspiration in model 4 improved the prediction of the donation amount model (change 0.061) significantly. To validate the role of inspiration in our context, we additionally accounted for the influence of inspiration intensity on donation behavior in the overall sample ($N = 8697$; see model 6). All donors who left no comment were coded with 0 for inspiration intensity. We find the influence of inspiration intensity on the total donation amount given by a peer donor to still be positive and significant.

In this aspect, our study highlights what Nordstrom et al. (2022) and Liang et al. (2016) have previously suggested, namely that inspiration should be paid attention to in a nonprofit context. We have provided empirical evidence on the effect of inspiration on donation behavior. Considering this result in the context of the mechanisms driving charitable giving proposed by Bekkers and Wiepking (2011), we argue that inspiration can be understood as a facet of solicitation. It is likely that the act of solicitation for donation alone inspires donors, thereby motivating donors to pursue donation behavior. Depending on who is asking and what the solicitation looks like, this effect can be amplified. However, the R^2 value across all models is considerably low. Therefore, we believe that further research is needed for establishing the role played by donor inspiration. It is very likely that inspiration serves as a mechanism that primarily elicits donation behavior, whereas the magnitude of the donation may be influenced by various additional factors, such as income (Konrath & Handy, 2018; Wiepking & Handy, 2015). Unfortunately, we lack a comparison with nondonors who were solicited to donate to the WorkoutforWater campaign but decided not to donate, and therefore were not inspired.

4.1.6 | Controls

The regression models 2 and 5 in Table 5 included our controls and provided three noteworthy findings. First, women gave significantly higher donation amounts than men but were not significantly more inspired. Second, donors who donated in USD gave significantly higher donation amounts compared with donors donating in NZD, Euros, GBP, AUD, and CAD. Third, regarding the peer fundraisers control variable, the models suggest that when asked to donate by a peer fundraiser perceived as highly reputed, the donors were significantly more inspired and gave significantly higher donation amounts.

5 | THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

As a point of departure, this study conceptualizes donor inspiration as an understudied concept in nonprofit literature in a peer-to-peer giving setting. Although not the first to acknowledge the influence of inspiration in a nonprofit context (Liang et al., 2016; Nordstrom et al., 2022), by combining existing knowledge on the inspiration construct and the motivational theory of role modeling, our study contributes to the introduction of donor inspiration in nonprofit literature in three ways.

First, we contribute to nonprofit literature by the development of an original donor inspiration definition and framework, thereby augmenting the literature on motivational processes and solicitation. The framework introduces relevant components of donor inspiration, namely the source of inspiration and the intensity of donor inspiration, and illustrates their positive

relationship with donation behavior. Thereby, we acknowledge and adopt the core logic of Thrash, Elliot, et al. (2010); Thrash, Maruskin, et al. (2010). However, we regard our conceptualization as an initial conceptual step in donor inspiration literature. Future research could use this base to develop a more comprehensive framework that includes antecedents and further psychological consequences (emotion, donor intention, and donor identification) as well as conceptualize more behavioral outcomes (Beldad et al., 2014; Boenigk & Helmig, 2013; Sargeant, 2001). Nevertheless, we hope that our research helps broaden the current knowledge base on inspiration in a nonprofit context.

Second, we contribute to the literature by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between donor inspiration and donor behavior, by applying an observable data approach. This is unique because previous empirical research was qualitative in nature (Nordstrom et al., 2022) or survey-based (Izogo & Mpinganjira, 2020; Liang et al., 2016). Therefore, we hope that presenting our approach of web-scraped data from a real-life campaign inspires nonprofit researchers to adopt and use similar methods in their own nonprofit research area.

Third, our results contribute to the literature by highlighting the importance of two additional learnings, previously not considered in peer-to-peer giving literature. First, our study emphasizes that peer donors show donation behavior because they find the peer fundraiser inspiring. Therefore, we suggest inspiration as a new driving factor of peer giving. Second, we show that the collaboration of nonprofit and business organizations offers a suitable environment to foster the participation of peer fundraisers and trigger peer donor's donation behavior. Since our framework is context specific, research in other contexts, such as crowdfunding (van Teunenbroek et al., 2023), is required to provide an understanding of peer-to-peer interactions in more depth.

6 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While working with real campaign data, as opposed to traditional survey data, is an innovative approach in nonprofit research that allows for a large sample and behavioral data obtained in a real-world setting, this approach comes with several limitations. First, we measured donor inspiration based on objective data instead of using an established inspiration scale (Böttger et al., 2017; Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Therefore, construct validity can be an issue as we cannot assess the quality of our measurement; instead, we can only report intercoder reliability for our measurement of donor inspiration statements. Further, we were not able to measure a donation intention construct, which we regard as important for the distinction of the inspired-to component. From a methodological perspective, we invite future research to replicate our study using existing and established inspiration scales. This could account for similarities and differences between the inspired-to component and other psychological construct underlying donation decisions. Additionally, such an approach would be practical for assessing the robustness of our findings, especially regarding the mediation effect.

Second, reversed causality might be a problem in our approach involving observable data (Leszczensky & Wolbring, 2022). While we conceptualize the effect from donor inspiration on donation behavior, it is conceivable that the effect may be the other way around. It is possible that donors who have donated higher amount of money want to justify their donation by making an inspirational statement along with their donation after deciding on how much to donate. To validate our findings and address the issue of reversed causality, we encourage future research to use a randomized experimental approach (Rosenbaum, 2017). Further, from a

statistical point of view, Leszczensky and Wolbring (2022) suggest using multilevel structural equation modeling.

Third, the concept of donor inspiration was tested in a specific peer-to-peer context, and therefore its generalizability in nonprofit literature is not confirmed. In other contexts, such as volunteering in disaster management, inspiration may play a different role. We invite future research to address the impact of donor inspiration on behavioral consequences, in other nonprofit settings.

7 | PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The main implication of this study is that nonprofit managers should focus on inspiration as a core element in developing new donor recruitment strategies. In reflecting our finding that donor inspiration positively affects donation behavior, managers should answer three strategic questions.

First, who or what is the inspirational source in the peer-to-peer campaign? Our study implies that the peer fundraisers are the main source of inspiration in peer-to-peer campaigns. More precisely, peer fundraisers who have a certain reputation within the peer community, and are therefore, most likely to be role models, inspire donors to give more. Accordingly, it is advisable to identify the most inspirational source and get them engaged in the campaign. In this regard, establishing influencer marketing is another option to reach new donors.

Second, in which context does inspiration trigger donation behavior? A second implication of our study is that peer-to-peer campaigns offer nonprofit managers a good opportunity to reach new donor groups by using peer fundraisers as inspirational intermediates. We recommend that managers should implement more such peer-to-peer campaigns. More precisely, using a collaboration like WorkoutforWater reaches more potential new donors than family- or friend-based campaigns; however, the utility of these types is limited. Therefore, we also recommend implementing family- and friend-based events as they can function as inspirational role models complementarily.

Third, over which channels should inspirational content be communicated? We suggest promoting peer-to-peer campaigns on social media, as research has confirmed that this facilitates the promotion of inspirational content (Castillo et al., 2014; Izogo & Mpinganjira, 2020). Furthermore, social media allows the inspired donor to become a source of inspiration for their own social network as well, by sharing details of the supported cause or their donation. In terms of the type of inspirational content, we suggest that peer fundraisers should be highlighted alongside the social cause in all communication, in order to achieve more donations.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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APPENDIX A

See Figure A1.

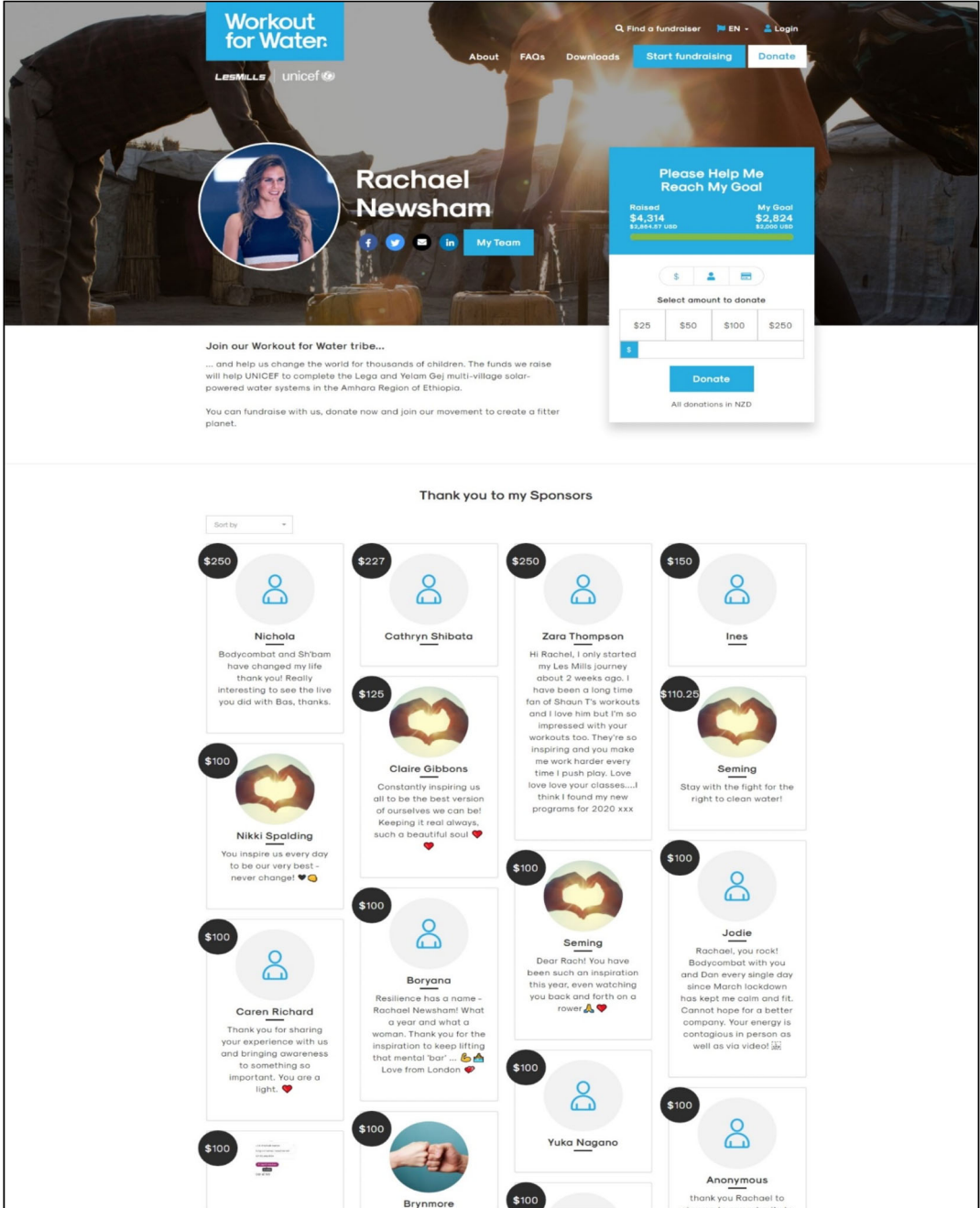


FIGURE A1 Landing Page WorkoutforWater Campaign. (Source: <https://www.workoutforwater.org/fundraisers/rachaelnewsham>).

APPENDIX B: MEASUREMENT

Dimension	Variables	Measurement	Operationalization
Donor inspiration (inspired-by)	Source of inspiration	0 = cause; 1 = peer fundraiser; 2 = both	Categorical variable, coded as 0 if the cause is the source of inspiration, coded as 1 if the peer fundraiser is the source of inspiration, and 2 if both are mentioned as source of inspiration.
Donor inspiration (inspired-to)	Inspiration intensity	1 = low; 2 = middle; 3 = high	For each comment accompanying a donation, we assessed the intensity level of expressed inspiration on a scale from 1 = low to 3 = high based on a qualitative content analysis.
Behavioral consequence	Donation	Continuous	Individual donation amount per transaction made on the campaign's webpage. For some analysis we log-transformed the variable.
Controls	Sex	1 = female; 2 = male	Binary variable, coded as 1 if the gendered name algorithm identified the donor as female, and coded as 2 if the algorithm identified the person as male.
	Currency zone	1 = USD; 2 = NZD; 3 = EURO; 4 = Pound Sterling; 5 = CAD; 6 = AUSD	Categorical variable, representing the currency the donations were displayed on the donation webpages.
	Peer fundraiser reputation	0 = basic trainer; 1 = highly reputed trainer; Champion.	Accounting for the peer fundraisers' reputation by their job position achieved within their fitness career. Binary variable, coded as 1 if the peer fundraiser is a global representatives, national trainers, assessors, and presenters ("champions").

APPENDIX C

See Figure C1.

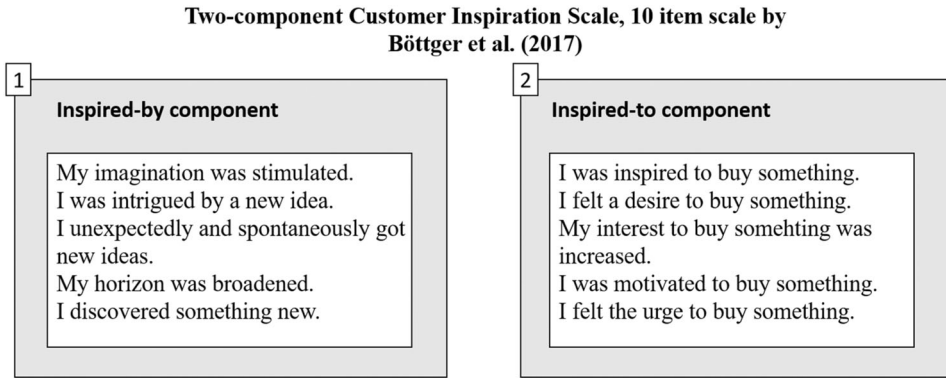


FIGURE C1 10 Item Customer Inspiration Scale of Böttger et al. (2017).

APPENDIX D: EXAMPLE DONOR INSPIRATION CODING

Source	Intensity	Example
Peer fundraiser	1 = low	“Well done guys, great idea.” “This is great! Well done”
	2 = middle	“Best of regards to a great inspirational coach”
	3 = high	“Constantly inspiring us all to be the best version of ourselves we can be!” “Resilience has a name—Rachael Newsham! What a year and what a woman. Thank you for the inspiration to keep lifting that mental ‘bar’”
Social cause	1 = low	“Sounds like a good project! Good luck!”
	2 = middle	“Wow—what an impressive cause! Good luck x”
	3 = high	“What an inspiring and great cause. It made me think how easy my life is. Cold water dispensed from the refrigerator door!”
Both	1 = low	“Good Luck Tamsey. This is a great cause and thanks for allowing me to be a part of it!”
	2 = middle	“This is a cause that really makes a difference. It’s cool that we can use the thing we love to help people live better lives”
	3 = high	“Happy to support an inspirational person for a great cause. God bless x”

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