

# Charities Can Increase the Effectiveness of Donation Appeals by Using a Morally Congruent Positive Emotion

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Prosocial organizations have different moral objectives. Some seek to promote welfare (e.g., Red Cross), but others seek to promote justice and equality (e.g., ACLU). Additionally, these organizations can induce different positive emotions to motivate donations. If organizations are seeking to promote different moral objectives using positive emotions, which positive emotion will be the most effective for their respective campaigns? **We demonstrate how the congruency between the moral domain of an emotion and the moral objective of an organization plays a role in influencing prosocial behaviors. Charities that seek to increase care in society (e.g., disaster-relief charities) should utilize compassion in their promotion campaigns, but charities that seek to promote fairness and equality in society (e.g., human rights charities) should utilize gratitude in their promotion campaigns.** One field study ( $N = 2,112$ ) and four experiments ( $N = 2,100$ ) demonstrate that utilizing a positive emotion congruent with the charity's moral objective increases monetary donations and preferences. The preferences are driven by the moral concerns made salient by the respective emotions. Further, the preferences attenuate when exchange norms are made salient. Altogether, these results underscore the importance of considering moral congruence in consumption contexts.

**Keywords:** moral domains, positive emotions, prosocial behavior, gratitude, compassion

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Different charities seek to promote different types of prosocial behaviors, encompassing various socio-moral concerns and issues (Caruana 2007). An analysis of the top-rated charities in the United States reveals that 48% of the charities aim to raise donations for humanitarian relief and welfare causes. These charities (e.g., American Red Cross, Feeding America, Make a Wish Foundation) promote prosocial behaviors that encompass *care* moral values. On the other hand, 32% of the top charities in the United States seek to raise donations for freedom, justice, and equal rights causes. These charities (e.g., the American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], Human Rights Watch, Center for Constitutional Rights) promote prosocial behaviors that encompass *fairness* moral values. Thus, different charities aim to highlight either care or fairness moral values in their campaigns to make consumers perform a specific type of prosocial behavior.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **Web appendix** A provides details for the charity analysis. The remaining charities represent moral values of either authority (2%),

In this research, we investigate how these two types of charities can boost donation appeals by utilizing different positive emotions in their promotion campaigns. If the welfare charities, like the Red Cross, are seeking to highlight care moral values, which emotion will be the most effective for their campaign? Moreover, should the equality/justice charities, like the ACLU, which are seeking to highlight fairness moral values, use the same emotion?

Research has shown that positive emotions can motivate prosocial behaviors and help charities raise monetary donations (Agrawal, Menon, and Aaker 2007; Fredrickson 1998; Isen 1987; Small and Verrochi 2009). More specifically, recent research has demonstrated that some positive emotions—compassion, gratitude, love, and awe—are especially predisposed for motivating prosocial behaviors (Bartlett and DeSteno 2006; Cavanaugh, Bettman, and Luce 2015; Stellar et al. 2017). This stream of work would suggest that charities should utilize one of these emotions (e.g., compassion, gratitude) over other positive emotions (e.g., happiness, hope) in their promotion campaigns. However, this prior research has not considered that different charities aim to promote different prosocial causes. Thus, this line of work would be agnostic to the different types of charities outlined above. Consequently, the extant research can be taken to suggest that both the Red Cross and ACLU can utilize the *same* emotion to serve their objectives. For example, both organizations could utilize gratitude (or compassion) equally effectively.

The present research, on the other hand, presents a novel proposition. We posit that because the Red Cross and the ACLU seek to promote different moral objectives, they should employ *different* emotions, specific to their moral causes. We build upon the social functional framework of emotions (Frijda and Mesquita 1994; Haidt 2003; Keltner and Haidt 1999) to theorize and demonstrate that the congruence between the moral objective of an organization and the moral domain of an emotion can increase the effectiveness of promotion campaigns. Charities seeking to promote welfare and humanitarian relief causes should employ an emotion that prioritizes the ethical concerns of care, but charities seeking to promote justice and equality causes should employ an emotion that prioritizes ethical concerns of fairness. Specifically, the Red Cross should utilize compassion and the ACLU should use gratitude in their respective promotion campaigns.

In the next section, we first briefly encapsulate the theorization outlining how different charities should utilize different positive emotions, contingent upon their moral objectives. We then report results from one field study ( $N = 2,112$ ) and four other experiments ( $N = 2,100$ ) examining this proposition. Results show that charities seeking

to promote welfare and humanitarian causes can increase monetary donations when they utilize compassion in their campaigns, as opposed to other positive emotions (i.e., gratitude, love, awe, happiness). Contrastingly, charities seeking to promote justice and equality can increase monetary donations when they utilize gratitude in their campaigns.

This is the first research, to the best of our knowledge, to empirically demonstrate that the moral congruency of positive emotions can be employed to influence preferences and behaviors. Thus, this research adds to the nascent stream of literature examining the effects of different moral domains on consumer behaviors (Goenka and Thomas 2019; Kaikati et al. 2017; Kidwell, Farmer, and Hardesty 2013; Winterich, Zhang, and Mittal 2012). Moreover, we also demonstrate a novel moderator showing that the effectiveness of morally congruent advertising attenuates when exchange social norms are salient. Consequently, this research produces distinct implications for organizations operating in the moral sphere by demonstrating how managers can utilize different positive emotions to boost charitable donations and preferences for prosocial products.

## MORAL DOMAINS OF EMOTIONS

The Moral Foundations Theory proposes that morality consists of five distinct moral domains: Harm/Care, Fairness/Reciprocity, Ingroup/Loyalty, Authority/Respect, and Purity/Sanctity (Graham et al. 2011; Haidt 2007; Haidt and Graham 2007). Each of these domains is argued to operate independently to motivate its own set of moral concerns, judgments, and behaviors. For instance, the Harm/Care domain is proposed to represent the principles that motivate humans not to harm other beings and to care for those in need. However, the Fairness/Reciprocity domain represents principles that prompt people to ensure reciprocal behavior and equal treatment for all members of society.

Crucially, researchers have also argued that some emotions shape ethical behaviors by prioritizing different socio-moral concerns associated with the different moral domains (Haidt 2003; Horberg, Oveis, and Keltner 2011). That is, emotions can prioritize an individual's sensitivity to a specific type of moral concern over the others (Haidt 2003; Hutcherson and Gross 2011). In other words, emotions can be specific to one moral domain. These emotions that shape morality are called *moral emotions* and are defined by Haidt (2003, 853) as “emotions that are linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent.” Moral emotions provide the motivational force to do good and to avoid doing wrong (Kroll and Egan 2004). They serve as

loyalty (10%), or sanctity (8%). These charities are not empirically examined in the present research due to their relatively low prevalence, but we discuss them briefly in the General Discussion.

an intuitive guide to help humans make ethical and moral choices (Keltner, Horberg, and Oveis 2012).

The bulk of the research examining moral emotions has focused on demonstrating the domain specificity of negative emotions (Horberg et al. 2009; Hutcherson and Gross 2011; Rozin et al. 1999). For instance, researchers have outlined how disgust is specific to the Purity domain, increasing an individual's sensitivity to moral and physical pollution; anger is specific to the Fairness domain, increasing an individual's sensitivity to violations of justice; and contempt is specific to the Authority domain, increasing concerns about respecting social hierarchies. Similarly, researchers have also outlined how shame, embarrassment, and guilt can lead to different moral behaviors by prioritizing different moral values (Tangney, Stuewig, and Mashek 2007).

While researchers have speculated that discrete positive emotions can also diverge in their moral consequences (Horberg et al. 2011), to the best of our knowledge no work has demonstrated this empirically. Further, extant research has not specified a behavioral dependent variable in the context of the domain specificity of positive emotions. Therefore, we seek to add to the literature on moral domains by empirically demonstrating that two positive emotions (compassion and gratitude) operate in different moral domains (care and fairness). Further, we theorize and demonstrate that the domain specificity of these emotions leads to different prosocial behaviors.

Moreover, examining the domain specificity of positive emotions extends the literature on emotion congruence effects in consumer behavior. Researchers in this field have outlined how discrete positive emotions can vary along several dimensions (e.g., arousal, temporal focus, self-other focus, evolutionary goals) and demonstrated how the congruency between these dimensions and the product's features can increase preferences (Agrawal et al. 2007; Fedorikhin and Patrick 2010; Griskevicius, Shiota, and Nowlis 2010; Kim, Park, and Schwarz 2010; Mogilner, Aaker, and Kamvar 2012; Pham, Hung, and Gorn 2011; Winterich and Haws 2011). However, this stream of work has not considered the different moral domains of emotions. Therefore, this research produces novel implications for products and organizations operating in the moral sphere. While we focus on prosocial behaviors, our propositions have implications for understanding how emotions will influence various other moral consumption contexts (e.g., fair trade products, organic foods, brand activism), which we briefly outline in the General Discussion.

## HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

We bring together the literature examining positive emotions and prosocial behaviors with the literature on moral

domains to propose a novel account of how charities should utilize positive emotions in their campaigns. We argue that organizations should utilize an emotion that is congruent with their moral objective. Charities that seek to support welfare and humanitarian relief causes (e.g., the Red Cross) should utilize an emotion that promotes care moral values. Specifically, these charities should utilize compassion over other positive emotions. However, charities that seek to promote justice and equality issues (e.g., the ACLU) should utilize an emotion that promotes fairness moral values. Specifically, these charities should utilize gratitude over other positive emotions. Below we present the rationale for why these different charities will benefit by utilizing the respective emotions.

### Welfare/Humanitarian Charities and Compassion

Compassion is defined as the feeling that arises when one sees the suffering of a vulnerable person and emotionally connects with their distress (Goetz, Keltner, and Simon-Thomas 2010; Oveis, Horberg, and Keltner 2010; Strauss et al. 2016). Notably, compassion is distinct from empathy, which refers to the vicarious experience of another's emotions (Bloom 2017). Similarly, compassion can also be distinguished from sympathy, which is considered a blend of sadness and love (Shaver et al. 1987). Importantly, compassion has been shown to increase prosocial behavior and altruism toward kin and non-kin (Stellar et al. 2017). Compassion inductions in the laboratory can increase generosity and helping behavior (Oveis et al. 2010; Saslow et al. 2013). Further, compassionate individuals are also more willing to engage in costly forms of prosocial behavior, such as taking painful shocks in place of other individuals (Batson et al. 1981).

Now, one stream of thought posits that compassion guides moral judgment across all the domains (Goetz et al. 2010). That is, compassionate people are attuned to violations of harm but are also equally attuned to violations of fairness, freedom, and purity of the weaker members of the group. However, some theorists have proposed, but not empirically tested, that compassion specifically increases the salience of Harm/Care concerns, as it evolved to enhance cooperation within a social group through its unique purpose of strengthening the welfare of the vulnerable, weak, and suffering members of the group (Horberg et al. 2011; Keltner 2009). That is, compassion specifically improves the evolutionary fitness of the social group by increasing the sensitivity to others' suffering (Nussbaum 1996). Moreover, recent evidence shows that compassion inductions activate the vagus nerve and the periaqueductal gray region of the midbrain, which are known to promote nurturing behaviors (Simon-Thomas et al. 2012; Stellar et al. 2015). Hence, this theorization of compassion proposes that it uniquely prioritizes socio-moral concerns of Harm/Care rather than other moral concerns. In other

words, when people feel compassionate, they are primarily motivated to care for those in need and alleviate their suffering. Subsequently, compassionate individuals deprioritize other moral concerns, such as those of equality, purity, and loyalty. Thus, we predict that charities seeking to promote care in society will be best served by utilizing compassion in their campaigns. Formally, we hypothesize:

**H1:** Charities that serve to alleviate harm and increase care in society (vs. other moral objectives) can increase donations and preferences by utilizing compassion (vs. other positive emotions).

### Equality/Justice Charities and Gratitude

Gratitude is defined as the feeling that arises when one recognizes that one has received some unearned benefit from an external agent (Emmons 2004). Importantly, several studies have demonstrated gratitude's ability to motivate prosocial behavior (Ma, Tunney, and Ferguson 2017; McCullough and Tsang 2004). Maintaining gratitude diaries has been shown to increase prosocial tendencies in everyday life (Emmons and McCullough 2003). Feeling grateful to a benefactor increases direct reciprocity toward that person, but also increases helping behavior and generosity toward third-party strangers (Bartlett and DeSteno 2006; McCullough and Tsang 2004). Further, grateful individuals are also more likely to cooperate with others in economic games and social situations (DeSteno et al. 2014).

Now, whereas the link between compassion and care might seem intuitive, the relationship between gratitude and fairness does not appear to be so evident initially. Gratitude could also guide other forms of moral behaviors, such as motivating care for the individual who provided the benefit (McCullough et al. 2001). However, some researchers have argued, but not empirically demonstrated, that gratitude is specific to the Fairness/Reciprocity domain (Haidt 2003; Horberg et al. 2011). This is because gratitude makes people especially sensitive to the benefits they have received in life (e.g., "I am grateful to my parents for supporting my college education") (McCullough, Kimeldorf, and Cohen 2008). This sensitivity to benefits received is coupled with gratitude's motivational tendency to reciprocate (Nowak and Roch 2007). When people feel grateful, they are instinctively motivated to reciprocate the favor to the benefactor ("I want to give back to my parents") (McCullough and Tsang 2004) and even engage in upstream reciprocity (pay-it-forward behavior) (Bartlett and DeSteno 2006; DeSteno et al. 2010). Importantly, the sensitivity to benefits also motivates behavior beyond reciprocity. It also makes people aware of the various benefits in their lives that others may not have had ("I was able to go to college, unlike many others")

(Tsang 2006). Subsequently, gratitude increases the sensitivity to the possession and distribution of benefits and resources in society, and to the potential unfairness of the possession and distribution of these benefits ("Everyone does not have the equal resources to attend college").

In sum, gratitude makes people attuned to the distribution of societal resources among the group, which makes them cognizant of the values of reciprocity but also fairness, equality, and justice. Subsequently, grateful individuals deprioritize other moral concerns, such as those of care, loyalty, and purity. Thus, we predict that charities seeking to promote equality and justice in society will be best served by utilizing gratitude in their campaigns. Formally, we hypothesize:

**H2:** Charities that serve to increase fairness and justice in society (vs. other moral objectives) can increase donations and preferences by utilizing gratitude (vs. other positive emotions).

### MODERATION BY EXCHANGE NORMS

Behaviors can be driven by both communal norms and exchange norms (Clark and Mills 1979). In exchange relationships, benefits are given with the expectation of receiving a benefit in return; however, in communal relationships, benefits are given in response to needs without expectation of a return benefit (Clark and Mills 1993). Relationships with business partners and merchants are typically characterized by exchange norms, but relationships with family members and close friends are typically characterized by communal norms (Clark, Mills, and Powell 1986). Importantly, research has shown that the salience of exchange versus communal norms can play a role in influencing consumer preferences and behaviors (Aggarwal 2004; Aggarwal and Law 2005; Aggarwal and Zhang 2006; Wan, Hui, and Wyr 2011).

Specifically, in the realm of prosocial behaviors, individuals typically donate under communal norms without expecting any direct benefits in return (Bryan, Hammer, and Fisher 2000; Clark and Mills 1993). However, many charitable donations are also characterized by exchange norms (Holmes, Miller, and Lerner 2002; Johnson and Grimm 2010). That is, people donate money with the lure of some return, such as charity merchandise, public recognition, or a tax deduction (Small and Cryder 2016). Research has shown that offering these exchanges is effective at increasing donations, but can alter donation motivations (Chao 2017; Newman and Shen 2012; Winterich, Mittal, and Aquino 2013).

We posit that the salience of exchange norms at the time of donation should weaken the moral congruence effect of the emotions. This is because moral values evolved to promote communal relationships and motivate communally oriented behaviors (Haidt 2003). In other words, the moral



values of care and fairness nudge individuals to perform prosocial behaviors to strengthen communal bonds, devoid of selfish reasons (Haidt 2001). Hence, when exchange norms are highlighted, rather than being motivated by communally oriented moral concerns, individuals will be motivated by aspects of the exchange benefit. Therefore, exchange norms should weaken the morally congruent prosocial preferences motivated by the emotions. Formally, we hypothesize:

**H3:** Salience of exchange norms will weaken the effect of the congruency between the moral values (care and fairness) and the emotions (compassion and gratitude) on prosocial preferences.

## OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

We conducted five studies to examine how different charities should utilize emotions congruent to their moral objectives. In all studies, we examine how the feelings of compassion and gratitude influence donations and preferences for charities representing care and fairness values. Importantly, studies 1, 2, and 3 induce the emotions through three different methods and measure consequential donation behavior. First, study 1 compares the effects of compassion and gratitude on charity choice in a field experiment. We find that subtle environmental cues of compassion increase the likelihood of donating to a charity representing care values, but gratitude cues increase the likelihood of donating to a charity representing fairness values. Study 2 examines how charity appeal advertisements with subtle emotion-inducing text can be more effective in soliciting monetary donations when the advertisement utilizes an emotion congruent to the organization's moral objective. Study 3 shows that explicit recall tasks of compassion and gratitude lead to different patterns of monetary donations contingent upon the charity's moral objective. Study 4 shows that the two emotions make different moral concerns salient, which mediates the effect on prosocial preferences. Study 5 shows that the congruent prosocial preferences attenuate when exchange norms are salient. Finally, we also conducted a supplementary study to rule out some alternative explanations for the effects of the emotions on prosocial preferences. These alternate accounts are outlined in the General Discussion, and the study details are reported in the [web appendix](#).

We collected all data after receiving an exemption status from the university research ethics committee. For all studies, we determined the sample size in advance and performed the analysis only after data collection was complete. We report all experimental conditions and all measures collected in each study. To maximize power, we pretested the stimuli for each experiment. Materials, procedural details, the research methods statement, and the data analysis statement are available in the [web appendix](#). Data

for all studies is available at the open science framework website (<https://osf.io/sczv4>).

## STUDY 1: FIELD EXPERIMENT

The first study was designed to examine whether different charities can increase donations by using morally congruent emotions in a real-life donation setting. We ran the experiment at a local coop grocery store, which operates a long-standing donation program to raise funds for local charities. We placed nonobtrusive flyers near the donation boxes to induce compassion and gratitude and examined how these emotion cues influenced donation choices. We predicted that compassion would increase donations to a charity that represents care moral values, but gratitude would increase donations to a charity that represents fairness moral values.

### Method

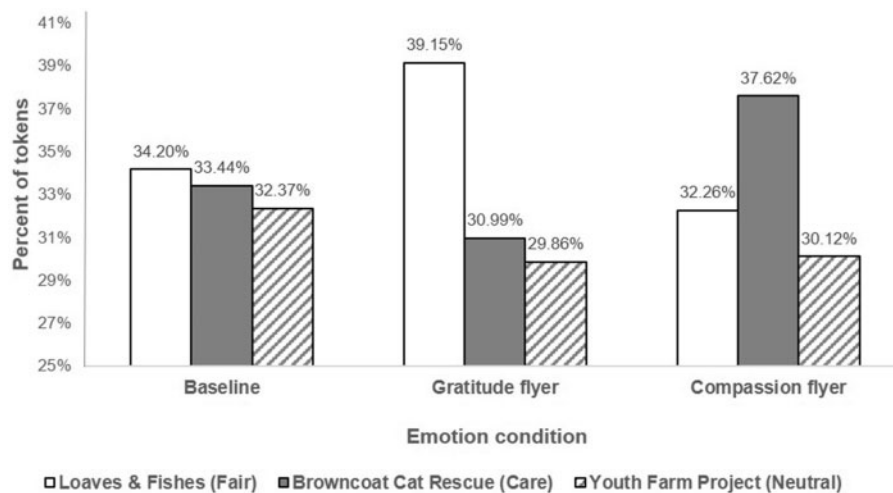
**Donation Program.** The store donates five cents to a charity of the customer's choosing, when they bring their own bags for their groceries. At the checkout counter, the customers who bring their own bags are given a single small wooden token. The customers take the token to the store exit, where they see a row of three donation boxes. The boxes are labeled with the name of a local charity, along with a brief description of the charity. Customers indicate their charity choice by depositing the wooden token in the appropriate box. The management counts the number of tokens in each box each fortnight and makes the appropriate donations. Note, the three charities are chosen by the management and remain constant for three months.

**Charity Options.** At the time of the experiment, the three charities selected by the management were: a) Loaves and Fishes (a local soup kitchen); b) Browncoat Cat Rescue (a local cat shelter); and c) Youth Farm Project (a farm program for local students). Crucially, the description of Loaves and Fishes evoked fairness values ("everyone has a right to a meal"), the description of Browncoat Cat Rescue evoked care values ("help unwanted, abandoned cats"), and the description of Youth Farm Project did not emphasize either moral value ("provide farm work experience for students"). These charity descriptions were pretested on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to ascertain that they represented the respective moral values (i.e., Loaves and Fishes as fairness, Browncoat Cat Rescue as care, Youth Farm Project as neutral). See [web appendix B](#) for complete charity descriptions as well as the pretest results.

**Emotion Cues.** We sought to examine how emotion cues can influence the donation choice between the three charities. First, the store recorded the number of tokens deposited in each box for a fortnight with no emotion cue.

FIGURE 1

## CHARITY CHOICE IN DONATION PROGRAM (STUDY 1)



NOTE.—Values on the vertical axis represent the percent of tokens in each box, with higher values indicating a higher percentage of tokens given to the charity. The horizontal axis represents the three different emotion conditions.

This formed our baseline measure of charity choice. Then the store placed a small flyer with a gratitude cue (“Who are you grateful for today?”) above the donation boxes. This flyer was left in place for two weeks, after which the number of tokens deposited in each box was recorded. Next, the store placed another small flyer with a compassion cue (“Who needs your compassion today?”). This flyer was also left in place for a fortnight, after which the number of tokens in each box was recorded. Importantly, researchers were not present at the store and did not interact with the shoppers at any point during the experiment. See [web appendix B](#) for photographs of the experimental setup and the pretest of the emotion flyers.

## Results

**Charity Choice.** We examined how the distribution of tokens among the charity boxes varied within each emotion condition using a series of chi-square tests (see [figure 1](#)). First, in the baseline weeks, there was no difference in the number of tokens deposited across the three boxes ( $N = 655$ ,  $\chi^2(2) = .33$ ,  $p = .847$ ). The percentage of tokens deposited in the fairness charity box (34.20%), care charity box (33.44%), and neutral charity box (32.37%) were equivalent. However, in the gratitude flyer weeks, there was a significant difference in the number of tokens deposited across the three boxes ( $N = 710$ ,  $\chi^2(2) = 10.96$ ,  $p = .004$ ). The percentage of tokens deposited in the fairness charity box (39.15%) was significantly higher than those deposited in the care charity box (30.99%,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.76$ ,

$p = .009$ ) and neutral charity box (29.86%,  $\chi^2(1) = 8.89$ ,  $p = .003$ ). But the percentage of tokens did not differ between the care charity box and the neutral charity box ( $\chi^2(1) = .15$ ,  $p = .700$ ). Further, in the compassion flyer weeks, again there was a significant difference in the number of tokens deposited across the three boxes ( $N = 747$ ,  $\chi^2(2) = 6.68$ ,  $p = .035$ ). The percentage of tokens deposited in the care charity box (37.62%) was marginally higher than those deposited in the fairness charity box (32.26%,  $\chi^2(1) = 3.07$ ,  $p = .080$ ) and significantly higher than the neutral charity box (30.12%,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.19$ ,  $p = .013$ ). But the percentage of tokens did not differ between the fairness charity box and the neutral charity box ( $\chi^2(1) = .55$ ,  $p = .459$ ). Importantly, we see that the interaction between the emotion flyer weeks (gratitude weeks and compassion weeks) and the focal charities (care charity and fairness charity) is significant ( $\chi^2(1) = 9.48$ ,  $p = .002$ ). Therefore, changing the flyer to compassion (from gratitude) increased the likelihood of donating to the care charity (vs. the fairness charity).

## Discussion

The results of this study provide support for our proposition that different charities can increase donations by utilizing morally congruent emotions. When customers are cued to feel grateful, they are more likely to donate to a charity that represents fairness moral values. However, when customers are cued to feel compassionate, they are more likely to donate to a charity that represents care moral values.

Importantly, these results demonstrate that the moral congruence between charities and emotions can alter prosocial behaviors in a real-world setting. Even so, we acknowledge that this study encompasses some limitations due to the design of the preexisting donation program. For instance, the charities also differed in the type of benefit provided (rescue cats vs. provide meals to the homeless). Hence, these results cannot conclusively establish that the effects are driven by the different moral values highlighted by the charities. Therefore, we now examine the moral congruence effect through more controlled studies.

## STUDY 2: CHARITY ADVERTISEMENTS

This study was designed to extend the results of the field study by examining the moral congruence effect in a more controlled experiment. Further, this study also demonstrates a managerially relevant scenario for how charities can utilize the respective emotions to increase charitable donations. In this study, we test whether the effectiveness of a donation appeal can be increased by utilizing a congruent emotion and moral value in the advertisement. Importantly, we keep the charity constant and manipulate the moral value represented by the charity.

The study employs a 2 (emotion: compassion vs. gratitude)  $\times$  2 (moral domain: care vs. fairness) between-subjects design. We induce the emotion through relatively subtle textual wording in an advertisement, without using the words “compassion” or “gratitude.” We also manipulate the moral domain of the charity to represent either care or fairness moral values in the advertisement itself. We predicted that when the emotion evoked and the moral domain highlighted are congruent, the advertisement will be more effective in soliciting monetary donations. The hypothesis, study design, and method of analysis were preregistered at the open science framework (<https://osf.io/zbr7a>).

## Method

We recruited 1,000 participants from MTurk to complete the study online in exchange for a small monetary compensation ( $M_{\text{age}} = 36.22$  years, 49% female). Participants were ostensibly recruited for a study on reading comprehension. First, they were asked to complete an unrelated word-completion task to match the cover story. Next, participants were told that the main tasks of the study had ended and were presented with a donation paradigm adapted from Barasch, Berman, and Small (2016). First, they were awarded a 50¢ bonus for completing the survey. Following this, we told participants that in observation of the recently passed Earth Day our laboratory is collecting funds for an environmental charity. We then showed them an advertisement for a real charity: The Conservation Fund.

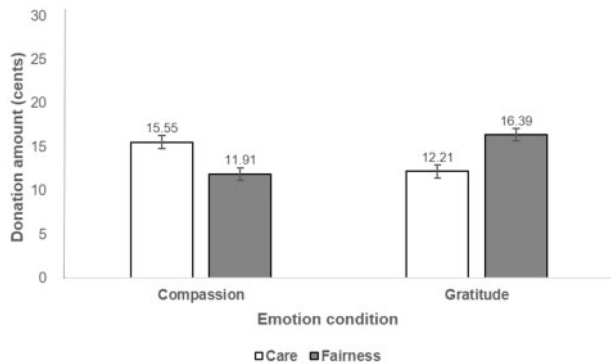
Participants were randomly assigned to view one of four advertisements for the charity. The advertisement text comprised two sections. The first paragraph was designed to make participants feel either compassion or gratitude by using text that induces the respective emotion (“For every tree withering in drought” vs. “For every tree that gives us nourishment”). Importantly, the text did not use the words “compassion” or “gratitude.” The second paragraph was designed to highlight either care or fairness moral domains (“We believe that our planet needs care” vs. “We believe that our planet must be treated fairly”). Thus, we created the four advertisements by making cross-combinations of these two text sections: a) compassion-care; b) gratitude-care; c) compassion-fair; and d) gratitude-fair. These advertisements were pretested to ascertain that they evoked the respective emotions (see [web appendix C](#)). Importantly, participants were encouraged to visit the charity’s website to gather more information. Thus, participants were conscious of the fact that this charity was real, and that the donation was consequential.

Below the advertisement, we appealed to them to donate a part of their bonus to the charity. They indicated the amount they were willing to donate on a continuous slider (0¢–50¢). Finally, basic demographics were collected. Once data collection was completed, we made the appropriate donation to The Conservation Fund and gave each participant the remaining bonus amount based on his or her response. [Web appendix C](#) provides details for all the stimuli utilized.

## Results

**Donation Amount.** The donation data had an excess of zeros (38.5% of participants donated 0¢) and the distribution was skewed (skewness = .99; Shapiro-Wilk’s  $W = .79$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, we analyzed the donation data by performing a zero-inflated Poisson regression with the emotion condition and the moral condition as two independent factors (Lambert 1992). As predicted, the analysis found a significant interaction between the emotion condition and the moral condition on donation amounts ( $B = .28$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $Z = 8.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ). We explored this interaction through a series of contrasts. [Figure 2](#) plots the mean donation amounts observed for each experimental condition. Confirming hypothesis 1, in the care appeal condition, we found that donations were significantly higher with compassion ( $M = 15.55¢$ ,  $SE = .77$ ) than with gratitude ( $M = 12.21¢$ ,  $SE = .69$ ; Contrast = .13,  $SE = .02$ ,  $Z = 5.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ). And confirming hypothesis 2, in the fairness appeal condition, donations were significantly higher with gratitude ( $M = 16.39¢$ ,  $SE = .77$ ) than with compassion ( $M = 11.91¢$ ,  $SE = .70$ ; Contrast = .15,  $SE = .02$ ,  $Z = 6.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Concurrently, looking at the contrasts by emotion condition, we find significant differences between charity moral condition (care vs. fairness) for

FIGURE 2

DONATION AMOUNT BY EMOTION AND MORAL DOMAIN  
(STUDY 2)

NOTE.—Values on the vertical axis represent donation amounts in cents, with higher values indicating a greater amount donated to the charity. The horizontal axis represents the two different emotion conditions. Errors bars represent  $\pm 1$  SE.

compassion (Contrast = .13, SE = .02,  $Z = 5.13$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and for gratitude (Contrast =  $-.16$ , SE = .02,  $Z = 6.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ). See [web appendix C](#) for detailed results of the inflate and full regression models.

## Discussion

The results support the findings of the field study. Compassion increases the effectiveness of a charity appeal when care moral values are highlighted, but gratitude increases the effectiveness of a charity appeal when fairness moral values are highlighted. Importantly, this study manipulated the framing of the same charity to represent either care or fairness moral values, demonstrating that the effects are driven by moral concerns as opposed to other factors. Further, this study also demonstrates that the effects are robust even when the emotion is induced relatively subtly in the advertisement appeal. Therefore, these results suggest that charity appeals can employ the congruence between emotions and the moral domain of their cause to boost donations.

## STUDY 3: EMOTIONS DRIVE CHARITABLE DONATIONS

This study was designed to extend the results of previous studies by again demonstrating that the congruence between a charity's moral objective and the moral domain of an emotion can increase donations. However, in this study, we utilize a different method of emotion induction and solicit donations for a different charity for the sake of robustness. Further, we compare the effects of the two emotions

with that of another positive emotion—happiness—which is not believed to evoke moral concerns ([Haidt 2003](#)). This allows us to establish that the effects of compassion and gratitude on prosocial preferences are distinct from a generalized state of positive affect.

The study has a 3 (emotion: happiness vs. compassion vs. gratitude)  $\times$  2 (moral domain: care vs. fairness) between-subjects design. We predicted that both compassion and gratitude would increase donations compared to happiness; however, they would motivate greater donations to the charity when it is framed to be congruent with their respective moral domain. The hypothesis, study design, and method of analysis were preregistered at the open science framework (<https://osf.io/k8m45>).

## Method

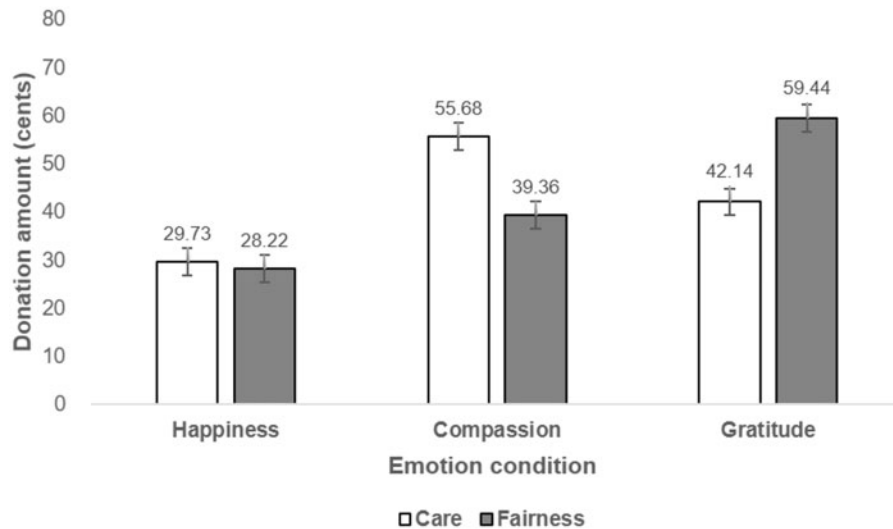
We recruited 500 participants from MTurk to complete the study online in exchange for small monetary compensation ( $M_{\text{age}} = 35.86$  years, 59% female). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three emotion conditions and given an essay writing task to evoke the desired emotion. Participants were asked to “recall a time you felt \_\_\_\_\_,” with the different emotion inserted as per the respective condition. Such essay writing tasks have been shown to successfully induce individual emotions ([Han et al. 2007](#); [Lerner and Keltner 2000](#)). Following this writing task, we presented participants with a 10-item emotion manipulation check adapted from the PANAS scale ([Watson, Clark, and Tellegen 1988](#)). Participants were asked to indicate on a five-point scale (1: not at all; 5: extremely) the extent to which they felt a series of generalized positive affect items (interested, happy, calm, enthusiastic, proud, inspired), two items that captured feelings of compassion (compassionate, kind), and two items that measured feelings of gratitude (grateful, thankful). This emotion manipulation check confirmed that the happiness, compassion, and gratitude writing tasks did not differ in the extent of positive affect they generated but induced the focal emotions respectively (see [web appendix D](#)).

Next, participants were told that the main tasks of the study had ended. They were then presented with a donation appeal similar to the previous study. Participants were awarded a \$1 bonus for completing the survey. Following this, we told participants that in observation of the recently passed Veterans Day our laboratory is collecting funds for a veterans' charity. We then showed them a short description of a real charity: Wounded Warrior Project. The description of the charity was framed to highlight either care or fairness. In the care description, we highlighted how the charity emphasizes the importance of caring for injured veterans and partakes in activities that seek to alleviate veterans' suffering. However, in the fairness description, we highlighted the importance of being fair to veterans by repaying them for their service, and how this charity



FIGURE 3

DONATION AMOUNT BY EMOTION AND MORAL DOMAIN (STUDY 3)



NOTE.—Values on the vertical axis represent donation amounts in cents, with higher values indicating a greater amount of bonus donated to charity. The horizontal axis represents the three different emotion conditions. Errors bars represent  $\pm 1$  SE.

advocates for veterans' rights to health care and compensation (see [web appendix D](#) for stimuli pretest). Importantly, participants were encouraged to visit the charity's website to gather more information. Thus, participants were conscious of the fact that this charity was real, and that the donation was consequential.

After the participants viewed either one of the descriptions, we appealed to them to donate a part of their bonus to the charity. They indicated the amount they were willing to donate on a continuous slider (\$0–\$1.00). Finally, basic demographics were collected. Once data collection was completed, we made the appropriate donation to the Wounded Warrior Project and gave each participant the remaining bonus amount based on his or her response. [Web appendix D](#) provides details for all the stimuli utilized.

## Results

**Donation Amount.** Again, we see that the donation data had an excess of zeros (25.6% of participants donated \$0) and the distribution was skewed (skewness = .33; Shapiro-Wilk's  $W = .85$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, we again analyzed the donation amount data by performing a zero-inflated Poisson regression ([Lambert 1992](#)). The analysis replicated our core result. As predicted, donation amounts significantly varied across the charity moral conditions for the compassion and gratitude conditions in opposite directions (see [figure 3](#)). We see a significant interaction

between compassion versus gratitude and the charity moral condition ( $B = .27$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $Z = 8.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In the care appeal condition, compassion ( $M = 55.68\text{¢}$ ,  $SE = 2.81$ ) evoked higher donations than gratitude ( $M = 42.14\text{¢}$ ,  $SE = 3.06$ ; Contrast = .17,  $SE = .02$ ,  $Z = 7.22$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Contrastingly, in the fairness appeal condition, gratitude ( $M = 59.44\text{¢}$ ,  $SE = 1.58$ ) evoked higher donations than compassion ( $M = 39.36\text{¢}$ ,  $SD = 3.06$ ; Contrast = .10,  $SE = .02$ ,  $Z = 4.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Concurrently, looking at the contrasts by emotion condition, we find significant differences between charity moral condition (care vs. fairness) for compassion (Contrast = .18,  $SE = .02$ ,  $Z = 7.73$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and for gratitude (Contrast =  $-.09$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $Z = 4.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Thus, the congruence of the emotion and the moral domain of the charity can significantly increase donations.

Regarding happiness, we see that this emotion induces fewer donations than compassion and gratitude (main effect of happiness vs. compassion and gratitude combined:  $B = -.29$ ,  $SE = .02$ ,  $Z = -13.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Importantly, we find that donation amounts do not differ in the happiness condition between the care appeal condition ( $M = 29.73\text{¢}$ ,  $SD = 2.41$ ) and the fairness appeal condition ( $M = 28.22\text{¢}$ ,  $SD = 2.62$ ; Contrast =  $-.02$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $Z = .84$ ,  $p = .399$ ). Furthermore, happiness yields lower donations for both charities than the morally congruent emotion. That is, for the care appeal charity, compassion works better than happiness (Contrast = .36,  $SE = .02$ ,  $Z = 15.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and for the fairness appeal charity, gratitude

works better than happiness (Contrast = .26, SE = .02,  $Z = 10.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ). See [web appendix D](#) for detailed results of the inflate and full regression models.

## Discussion

The results of this study replicate previous results. Charities emphasizing care concerns can increase donations by utilizing compassion, but charities emphasizing fairness concerns can increase donations by utilizing gratitude. Further, these results rule out the possibility that the effects are driven by positive affect, as happiness demonstrated lower donations to both care and fairness charities. Hence, these results again show that the moral congruence between a charity's objective and the emotion can boost donations.

## STUDY 4: MEDIATION BY MORAL CONCERNS

The previous three studies demonstrated that the moral congruence between a charity's objective and the emotion employed can boost donations. These studies utilized three different methods to induce emotions and measured consequential donation behavior. We now turn to process evidence. This study was designed to demonstrate our central assertion that the observed effects are driven by the different moral concerns. This study used a 2 (emotion: compassion vs. gratitude) cell between-subjects design. We manipulate the two emotions and then measure preferences between a care and fairness charity. We also measure the salience of the two focal moral concerns by utilizing the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ; [Graham et al. 2011](#)), which captures endorsement of the individual moral domains. We predicted that compassion would increase endorsement of the care moral domain, but gratitude would increase endorsement of the fairness moral domain and that these moral concerns will drive the charity preferences.

## Method

We recruited 200 participants from MTurk to complete the study online in exchange for small monetary compensation ( $M_{\text{age}} = 35.5$  years, 50% female). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two emotion conditions—compassion or gratitude—and given an essay writing task to evoke the desired emotion, similar to study 3. Next, participants were introduced to an ostensibly unrelated charity evaluation study. We asked participants to imagine that they were going to donate \$1.00 right now and had to choose between two veterans' charities. We presented participants with descriptions of two veteran charities side-by-side. These were the same descriptions utilized in study 3 but were now labeled Charity A (care description) and

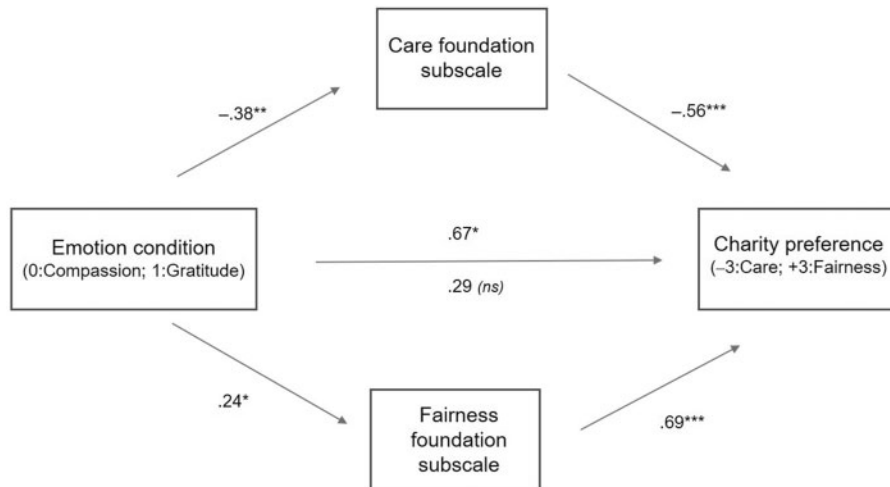
Charity B (fairness description). Participants indicated which charity they were more willing to donate the \$1.00 toward on a continuous slider scale (−3: Charity A; +3: Charity B).

Then we administered the care and fairness subscales of the Moral Foundations Questionnaire. This scale provides a separate score for the moral foundations based on moral relevance measures and moral judgment measures. Participants are asked 15 items on moral relevance: "When you decide whether something is right or wrong, how relevant are the following considerations" (1: Not at all relevant; 6: Extremely relevant); example items include "Whether or not someone cared for the weak or vulnerable" and "Whether or not someone acted unfairly." Then participants are asked 15 items on moral judgment: "Please indicate your agreement on the following statements" (1: Strongly disagree; 6: Strongly agree); example items include "One of the worst things a person can do is hurt a defenseless animal" and "Justice is the most important requirement for a society." Finally, basic demographics were collected. See [web appendix E](#) for all stimuli.

## Results

**Mediation Analysis.** To test the theory that the emotions induce different moral concerns, which drive different preferences for charities, we performed a parallel mediation analysis using PROCESS model 4 with 5,000 bootstrap samples ([Hayes 2013](#)). Emotion condition was the independent variable (0 = compassion, 1 = gratitude); the charity preference was the dependent variable (−3: care charity; +3: fairness charity); and the care concern ( $\alpha = .78$ ) and fairness concern ( $\alpha = .88$ ) subscales were the two parallel mediators (see [figure 4](#)). First, the analysis showed that gratitude, compared to compassion, increased preference for the fairness charity ( $B = .67$ , SE = .29,  $t = 2.31$ ,  $p = .022$ , 95% CI [.09, 1.24]), replicating the results of the previous studies. Next, we see that evoking gratitude, compared to compassion, significantly increased endorsement of the fairness concern subscale (4.78 vs. 4.54;  $B = .24$ , SE = .11,  $t = 2.15$ ,  $p = .033$ , 95% CI [.02, .46]). Also, evoking gratitude, compared to compassion, significantly reduced endorsement of the care concern subscale (4.46 vs. 4.84;  $B = -.38$ , SE = .13,  $t = -2.92$ ,  $p = .004$ , 95% CI [−.63, −.12]). This indicates that the two emotions make different moral concerns salient. Further, endorsement of the fairness concern subscale significantly increased preference for the fairness charity ( $B = .69$ , SE = .19,  $t = 3.63$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.32, 1.07]). On the other hand, endorsement of the care concern subscale significantly reduced preference for the fairness charity and, hence, increased preference for the care charity ( $B = -.56$ , SE = .16,  $t = -3.42$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [−.88, −.24]). When both the moral concern subscales were included in the model, the

**FIGURE 4**  
MEDIATION ANALYSIS (STUDY 4)



NOTE.— $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

effect of emotion condition on charity preference was no longer significant, showing full mediation ( $B = .29$ ,  $SE = .29$ ,  $t = 1.02$ ,  $p = .308$ , 95% CI  $[-.28, .87]$ ). The mediation pathway through the fairness concern subscale was significant (standardized indirect effect  $[.01, .17]$ ). The mediation pathway through the care concern subscale was also significant (standardized indirect effect  $[.03, .19]$ ). Hence, as predicted, the endorsement of the moral foundations mediated the effect of the emotion condition on charity preference.

## Discussion

The results of this study reinforce the results of the previous studies and provide support for our central theorization. That is, compassion increases preferences for welfare charities because it increases the salience of care moral concerns. However, gratitude increases preferences for equality/justice charities because it increases the salience of fairness moral concerns. Hence, the moral congruency effect is driven by the salience of the moral concerns evoked by the emotions.

Note that we also conducted a supplementary study with an additional happiness condition, which confirmed that compassion and gratitude independently increase the endorsement of the respective moral concerns. This study also utilized a fully between-subjects design for the two moral concern scales to reduce potential demand effects. Moreover, another supplementary study revealed that compassion and gratitude do not alter the endorsement of the other three moral concerns (authority, loyalty, and purity),

suggesting that the effects are particular to care and fairness moral concerns. Finally, for the sake of robustness, we also ran a third supplementary study using a different measure of moral concerns: the Moral Foundations Sacredness Scale (Graham and Haidt 2012). This study again found the same pattern of results. Web appendix E reports details for these three supplementary studies.

## STUDY 5: MODERATION BY EXCHANGE NORMS

This study was designed to examine the proposed boundary condition—salience of exchange norms. As argued before, the moral congruence effects of the emotions on prosocial preferences should weaken when exchange norms are salient. This study used a 2 (emotion: compassion vs. gratitude)  $\times$  2 (norm: control vs. exchange) between-subjects design. We manipulate the two emotions and then examine the effect of these emotions on charity preferences. Crucially, we also manipulate the salience of exchange norms when participants are evaluating the charities, by highlighting a gift in exchange for the donation. We then examine how the salience of the exchange norm moderates the effect of the emotions on prosocial preferences. We predicted that the moral congruence effects of the emotions would weaken when exchange norms are salient.

## Method

We recruited 400 participants from MTurk to complete the study online in exchange for small monetary

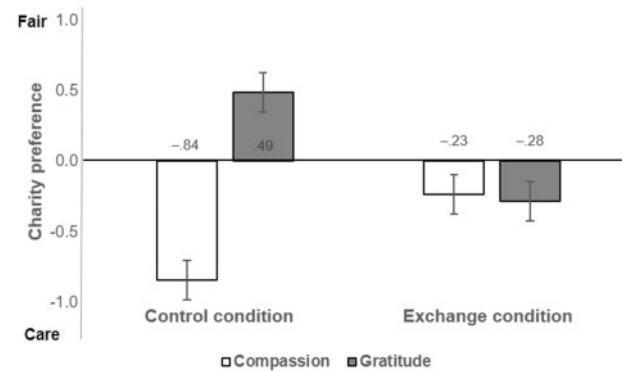
compensation ( $M_{\text{age}} = 37.2$  years, 46% female). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two emotion conditions (compassion vs. gratitude) and given an essay writing task to evoke the desired emotion, similar to study 3. Next, participants were introduced to an ostensibly unrelated charity evaluation study. We asked participants to imagine that they were going to donate \$100 right now and had to choose between two veterans' charities. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two social norm conditions, control or exchange. In the control condition, we presented participants with the same veterans' charity preference stimuli as study 4, with no changes. In the exchange condition, we added one statement to the charity descriptions to induce exchange norms at the time of donation: "In exchange for the donation, you will receive a branded fleece blanket." This scenario was inspired by the Wounded Warrior Project charity, which sends all donors a blanket in exchange for their donation. Importantly, this statement was identical for both the care and fairness charity descriptions. Hence, even in the exchange condition, the only difference between the two charities was their representativeness of care or fairness moral values. Subsequently, in both the control and exchange conditions, participants indicated which charity they were more willing to donate the \$100 toward on a continuous slider scale (−3: Charity A [care]; +3: Charity B [fairness]). Finally, basic demographics were collected. Note that the stimuli were pretested to ensure that the control condition by default evoked communal norms, but the inclusion of the blanket gift evoked exchange norms (see [web appendix F](#)).

## Results

**Moderation of Charity Preferences.** We performed a univariate ANOVA on the charity preference scores (−3: care charity; +3: fairness charity) with the emotion condition and social norm manipulation condition as two independent factors (see [figure 5](#)). The analysis revealed a significant interaction between the emotion condition and the social norm manipulation condition ( $F(1,396) = 12.21$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .03$ ). We explored this interaction through a series of planned contrasts. In the control condition, where we did not highlight the gift, we found a significant preference divergence between the emotion conditions ( $M_{\text{diff}} = -1.34$ ,  $SE = .28$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [−1.89, −.79]). Participants in the compassion condition preferred the care charity ( $M = -.84$ ,  $SD = 1.83$ ; deviance from 0:  $t = -4.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but participants in the gratitude condition preferred the fairness charity ( $M = .49$ ,  $SD = 2.03$ ; deviance from 0:  $t = 2.45$ ,  $p = .016$ ). Importantly, in the exchange condition we found no significant preference divergence between the emotion conditions ( $M_{\text{diff}} = .05$ ,  $SE = .28$ ,  $p = .857$ , 95% CI [−.50, .61]); that is, the charity preference for participants in both the emotion conditions did

FIGURE 5

CHARITY PREFERENCE BY EMOTION AND NORM CONDITION (STUDY 5)



NOTE.—Values on the vertical axis represent charity preference, with higher values indicating a greater preference for the fairness charity. The horizontal axis represents the different social norm conditions. Errors bars represent  $\pm 1$  SE.

not differ from each other. Participants in the compassion ( $M = -.23$ ,  $SD = 2.08$ ; deviance from 0:  $t = -1.04$ ,  $p = .300$ ) and gratitude condition ( $M = -.28$ ,  $SD = 1.96$ ; deviance from 0:  $t = -1.53$ ,  $p = .128$ ) were equally likely to choose the care or fairness charities.

## Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that the moral congruence effects weaken when exchange norms are salient. In the control condition (communal norms by default), we see that compassion increased preferences for the care charity, but gratitude increased preferences for the fairness charity, replicating previous results. In contrast, when participants were cued to view their donation as an exchange relationship, the moral values prompted by the two emotions no longer resulted in divergent prosocial preferences. Hence, these results suggest that charities seeking to utilize morally congruent emotions in their promotion campaigns may not want to highlight a direct exchange in their campaigns.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

### Summary

In this research, five studies together show that the moral congruence between a charity's objective and positive emotions can boost donations. Charities that promote welfare and humanitarian causes in society should employ compassion, but charities that promote equality and justice in society should utilize gratitude. Study 1 found that environmental cues of compassion and gratitude can alter



charity choices in a field setting. Study 2 demonstrated that the effectiveness of a charity appeal is enhanced when the emotion utilized and the moral domain highlighted in the advertisement are congruent. Study 3 found that explicit emotion recall tasks of compassion and gratitude can lead to different patterns of monetary donations for charities framed with different moral objectives. This study also demonstrated that the effects of the two emotions differ from that of happiness. Then, study 4 provided support for our central theorization by showing that the two emotions make different moral concerns salient, which mediates the effect of the emotions on prosocial preferences. Finally, study 5 demonstrated that the moral congruence effects attenuate when exchange norms are salient.

Together these five studies employed two different sample populations, three forms of emotion manipulation (environmental cues, subtle advertisements, and essay writing), three different study designs (choice, separate evaluation, and direct comparison), and three consequential donation paradigms. Importantly, these five studies and the supplementary studies examined the effect of the emotions on charities representing a myriad of domains (environment, veterans, food, health, etc.). Across all the studies we find robust evidence that charities can increase donations by utilizing an emotion congruent with their moral objective.

## Alternate Accounts

Our theorization proposes that compassion and gratitude motivate different prosocial preferences because they emphasize different moral concerns. However, these emotions also differ along some appraisal dimensions, which might explain the observed pattern of prosocial behaviors (Lerner and Keltner 2000; So et al. 2015). To rule out these alternate explanations, we ran a supplementary study (see [web appendix G](#) for the detailed method and results).

First, compassion, compared to gratitude, is appraised with high self-control (Goetz et al. 2010; Oveis et al. 2010). That is, compassion-inducing situations, which are associated with seeing others suffering, afford individuals a sense of personal control to act in the situation. Notably, feelings of control have been linked with a greater desire to help (Caprara, Alessandri, and Eisenberg 2012). Therefore, one could posit that compassion increases donations to welfare charities because of the appraisal of self-control, as opposed to the salience of care/harm moral concerns. We tested this possible account by comparing the effects of compassion with another positive prosocial emotion—love—that is also appraised with high self-control, but does not evoke care/harm moral concerns (Ellsworth and Smith 1988; Haidt 2003). We see that compassion and love evoked similar appraisals of self-control; however, love did not increase donations to the welfare charities. Further, the self-control appraisals did not mediate the effect of

compassion on charity preferences. This suggests that the effects of compassion on welfare charities cannot be explained by the self-control appraisals.

Second, gratitude, compared to compassion, is appraised with high other-agency (Armenta, Fritz, and Lyubomirsky 2017). That is, gratitude-inducing situations are associated with other individuals' helpful behavior, leading people to feel that others have agency in the situation (and they themselves do not). Notably, when individuals feel a lack of agency, they become more concerned with inequality issues (Choshen-Hillel and Yaniv 2011). Therefore, one could posit that gratitude increases donations to the equality/justice charities because of the other-agency appraisal, as opposed to the salience of fairness moral concerns. In order to test this possible account, we compared the effects of gratitude with another positive prosocial emotion—awe—that is also appraised with other-agency, but does not evoke fairness moral concerns (Haidt 2003; Shiota, Keltner, and Mossman 2007). The results showed that gratitude and awe evoke equivalent appraisals of other-agency; however, awe did not increase donations to equality/justice charities. Moreover, the other-agency appraisals did not mediate the effect of gratitude on charity preferences. This suggests that the effects of gratitude on equality/justice charities cannot be explained by the other-agency appraisals.

A final possibility is that compassion and gratitude lead to different prosocial preferences because they differ in the extent to which they prompt feelings of social connection. Notably, the strength of social connection has been shown to influence prosocial preferences (Cavanaugh et al. 2015; Twenge et al. 2007). We found that the two emotions did not differ in the degree to which they motivate social connection (measured using an established scale), indicating that the observed effects cannot be explained by this account.

## Theoretical Contributions

This is the first research, to the best of our knowledge, to empirically demonstrate that the moral congruency of positive emotions can be employed to influence preferences and behaviors. A nascent stream of literature has begun to examine how the moral domains can be leveraged to increase advertising effectiveness and influence consumer preferences (Goenka and Thomas 2019; Kaikati et al. 2017; Kidwell et al. 2013; Winterich et al. 2012). However, this existing work has focused on the moral domains in the context of political attitudes—that is, how liberals (vs. conservatives) respond to advertisements framed with the care and fairness moral domains (vs. authority, loyalty, and purity moral domains). Our research is the first to explore the effect of moral congruence on consumer preferences within the context of emotions. Hence,

we extend the understanding of how different moral domains can be applied to influence consumer preferences.

Second, our research makes contributions to the literature on moral psychology. As outlined before, several works have empirically demonstrated how discrete negative emotions can result in divergent moral behaviors (Horberg et al. 2009; Hutcherson and Gross 2011; Rozin et al. 1999; Tangney et al. 2007). While researchers have speculated that positive emotions can also be domain-specific (Haidt 2003; Horberg et al. 2011), no work has empirically demonstrated this effect. Therefore, this research fills that gap in the literature by showing how two positive emotions—compassion and gratitude—operate in different moral domains. Subsequent research can also build on this work to explore how other positive emotions (e.g., pride, hope) may also be domain-specific, enriching our understanding of how positive emotions can influence behaviors.

Importantly, the present findings contribute to the nascent stream of literature examining how discrete positive emotions can motivate unique preferences and behaviors (Cavanaugh et al. 2011, 2015; Fuchs, Schreier, and van Osselaer 2015; Mogilner et al. 2012; Morales 2005; Salerno, Laran, and Janiszewski 2015; Wilcox, Kramer, and Sen 2011; Winterich and Haws 2011). Future work can utilize these findings to predict how compassion and gratitude will guide preferences and decision making in other contexts like social cooperation and ethical trade-offs. For example, if compassion prioritizes care over other moral concerns, then compassionate people might be willing to help weaker members of the group even if that assistance violates fairness rules. On the other hand, if gratitude prioritizes fairness over other moral concerns, then grateful people might be more concerned about the fairness of the system and resist breaking the rules to help a weaker member of the group. Hence, researchers can examine other realms of behaviors to understand how the two emotions guide ethical decision making.

## Managerial Implications

This research produces distinct implications for prosocial organizations by demonstrating the importance of moral congruence in motivating prosocial behaviors. While researchers have outlined various factors that can increase the effectiveness of prosocial campaigns (see Small and Cryder 2016 for a review), we present a new framework to consider when designing a prosocial marketing campaign: the congruence between the moral objective of the charity and the moral concern activated by the emotion. Altogether, our results show that organizations seeking to promote welfare and humanitarian causes should utilize compassion, over all other positive emotions, in their campaigns. Contrastingly, organizations seeking to promote equality and justice causes should utilize gratitude

in their campaigns. Thus, each organization should identify the specific emotion that is congruent with their moral value to boost the effectiveness of the marketing campaign. Moreover, if charities want to benefit from moral congruence, they may not want to highlight direct exchanges in their campaigns.

Notably, while our research focusses on examining moral congruence in the prosocial realm, our findings suggest implications for several other moral consumption contexts. For example, future research can explore how different ethical products (e.g., fair trade products, organic foods, cruelty-free cosmetics) can be promoted by leveraging moral congruency. That is, given that cruelty-free cosmetics emphasize welfare for animals, advertisements that utilize care-inducing emotions (i.e., compassion) and care-related promotion messaging should be more effective in motivating preferences. Further, research can also explore how the different moral domains play a role in social stands taken by firms. For example, when brands support equality- and justice-related causes (e.g., LGBTQ rights, refugee rights), they might utilize messages with fairness-inducing emotions, such as gratitude- and fairness-related texts, to increase the effectiveness of the message.

Relatedly, future work can explore moral congruency with regards to other charity objectives. The survey of the top charities in the United States reveals that a smaller percentage of charities also tend to promote moral values of loyalty, authority, and sanctity. Furthermore, researchers have suggested that positive emotions like pride and awe could prompt these moral values (Haidt 2003; Horberg et al. 2011). Hence, subsequent research can explore the congruent emotions that will be effective for these unexamined charity objectives.

Finally, future work can explore moral congruency with regards to negative emotions. The present work does not address if positive and negative emotions will motivate different patterns of moral consumption. For instance, if anger also prioritizes fairness concerns like gratitude, which of the two emotions will be more effective for an organization seeking to promote this moral value? And, if an organization like PETA aims to promote welfare for animals, should it continue to use negative emotion campaigns (e.g., disgust and anger toward factory farming), or should it switch to campaigns that elicit compassion toward animals? Hence, subsequent research can investigate how the valence of the emotion and the moral domain of the emotion interact to motivate prosocial consumption.

## DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

All study designs and analyses were discussed and agreed upon by both authors. The first author managed the data collection for all studies. Data were collected through Amazon MTurk in the fall of 2017 (study 3), spring of

2018 (studies 2 and 4), and spring 2019 (study 5). Data for study 1 was collected at GreenStar Coop in the summer of 2018. The first author analyzed the data for all studies under the guidance of the second author. Data for all studies is available at the open science framework website (<https://osf.io/sczv4>).

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