

# Using Advertising Constructs and Methods to Understand Direct Mail Fundraising Appeals

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*This study examined whether we could use a Solicitation Response Model adapted from the consumer research literature to increase our understanding of nonprofit direct mail solicitations. We sent 389 surveys to people listed in the database of a homeless shelter. In response, 166 people rated an envelope and appeal from the shelter. The model successfully explained potential donors' intention to open the envelope and intention to donate. Emotional responses to the envelope and attitude toward the envelope were more important influences upon acquisition (or new) donors' intention to open the envelope than upon renewal donors' intention. Attitude toward the appeal had a stronger effect upon acquisition donors' intention to donate than it did upon renewal donors' intention. The study suggests differences in the way that appeals should be designed for acquisition and renewal donors. As well, we present a small sample method for diagnosing direct mail charitable solicitations.*

**D**IRECT MAIL CHARITABLE SOLICITATION is an enormous industry. Every U.S. household receives fourteen billion mailed charitable solicitations per year (Press, 1995). These mailings come in an incredible array of formats and contents. Nonprofit direct mail professionals have two basic questions: (1) Which mailing will work for my list? (2) Why do some mailings work better than others?

To figure out which mailing will produce the best effect, practitioners test charitable direct mail in a variety of ways. Some (such as

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Warwick, 2001) use focus groups. These have the advantage of getting relatively deep responses to a variety of aspects of the mailing. The disadvantage to focus groups is that samples are too small to be statistically representative, and the conditions of responding to the mailing are not natural. People respond in a focus group facility rather than at home where conditions are private. The interview guides developed to run focus groups may be ad hoc—we don't know why some questions are asked rather than others.

Other practitioners (Gordon, 1989; Greenfield, 1996; Kachorek, 1991) rely on huge test mailings to test fundraising packages against each other. One advantage of this approach is that the recipients respond naturally because they do not know they are being studied. Moreover, the samples are large enough to have substantial statistical power. The weakness of this approach is that only a very few aspects of the mailing can be tested (despite the sample size) and the technique does not reveal why one mailing works better than another. Respondents have no opportunity to explain why they like a particular package. We can, for example, test whether one of two envelope designs works better, but we do not know how important this is or why one envelope is more effective.

Why does a mailing work (or not work)? There is a great deal of good practical advice on how to design nonprofit direct mail (Greenfield, 1996; Lautman and Goldstein, 1991; Warwick, 2001; Huntsinger, 1992). However, no model presents a theoretical basis for effective direct mail charitable solicitation. A theoretical model could offer two advantages. First, it could help us to create guidelines for developing solicitations. Second, it could help us devise tests of nonprofit direct mail that would address some of the shortcomings in previous testing approaches.

This article proposes that models and methods from the consumer research literature can help us understand charitable direct mail. Charitable direct mail and consumer marketing have many similarities. Both come unbidden to a target audience. Each attempts to persuade people to send or spend money. A person in the target audience must decide either to pay attention or to ignore the message. Ultimately, each individual who attends to the message must decide whether to respond to the appeal by spending money.

For over twenty-five years, academics have researched models and tools for understanding advertising effectiveness. This article will demonstrate how direct mail fundraisers can apply these tools and models to improve their understanding of the effects of a particular appeal from a charity. In particular, the models presented here illustrate how acquisition and renewal donors respond differently to an appeal. Nonprofit managers may want to take these differences into account when creating and testing future fundraising solicitations.

## Applying Advertising Constructs to Direct Mail Charitable Solicitations

Figure 1 depicts an Advertising Response Model. This model reflects the key aspects of major work in consumer research: the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann, 1983), the Dual Mediation Hypothesis (MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch, 1986), and the role of emotional responses to advertising (Holbrook and Batra, 1987). In the model depicted in Figure 1, a person’s level of attention, involvement with the product category, and emotional reaction to an advertisement all affect his or her attitude toward that advertisement. In turn, that person’s attitude toward the ad directly affects attitude toward the brand, which is the most important determinant of intention to purchase the advertised product.

Figure 2 translates this general Advertising Response Model to the situation in which a person is responding to a charitable direct mail solicitation. Adapting the advertising concepts in Figure 1 to the nonprofit context required only small changes in meaning and measurement of the concepts in the model. We call this modified model the Solicitation Response Model and will describe the constructs used in the model.

Whether a consumer is very involved in a purchase for situational reasons (the boss is coming to dinner, and the choice of wine is important) or because of a long-term involvement with the product (a tennis buff is choosing a new racket), product category involvement affects a variety of responses to advertising (Celsi and Olson, 1988; Bloch, Sherrell, and Ridgeway, 1986). In the donation situation, cause involvement—which Campbell (1992) called “personal

Figure 1. General Advertising Response Model

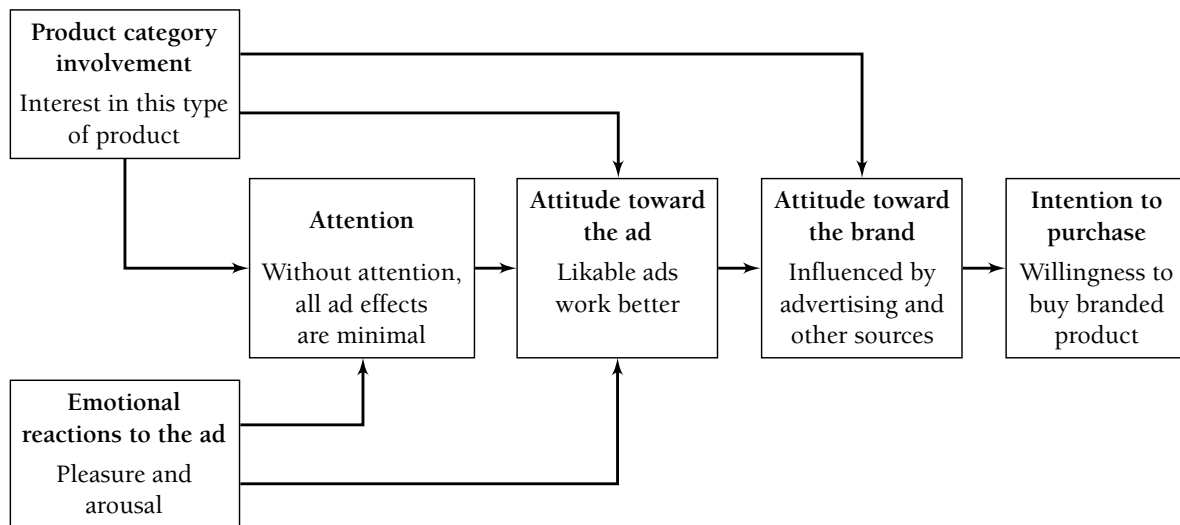
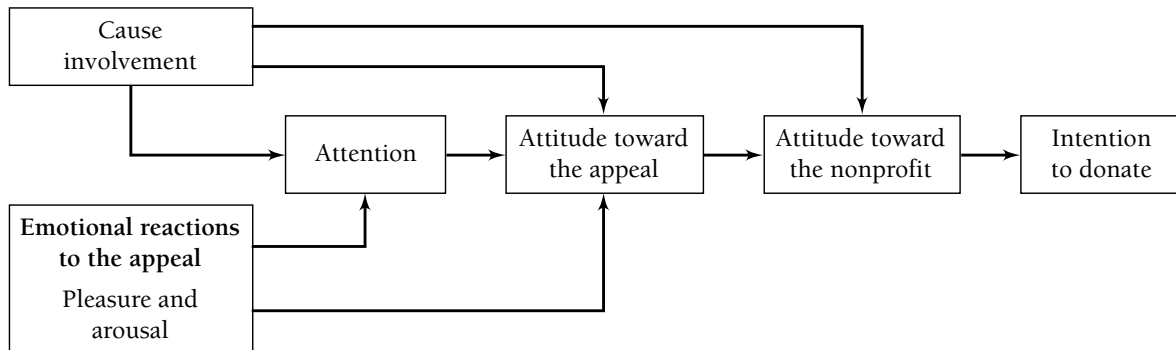


Figure 2. Solicitation Response Model



Note: This translates the general Advertising Response Model to a donation context.

relevance” (p. 3) and Bendapudi, Singh, and Bendapudi (1996) called “attachment to cause” (p. 39)—is directly analogous to product category involvement. In the consumer behavior literature, product category involvement goes beyond liking a single brand. For example, Bloch, Sherrell, and Ridgeway (1986) demonstrated that a person with enduring involvement in computers might be interested in more than one brand of computer. This is also true for cause involvement. People concerned about the homeless, world hunger, or the environment may consider donating to different organizations working on these problems.

Consumer researchers view involvement as a major determinant of the mental processes influencing purchase. The Elaboration Likelihood Model is one of the most widely cited models in consumer research. The basic premise of the model is that highly involved consumers are most influenced by the central arguments of an advertisement or communication. Less-involved consumers are more likely to respond to peripheral elements such as logos, pretty colors, or celebrity endorsements. We would expect people less involved with a charity or cause to base their response to an appeal on whether they liked the aesthetics of the appeal. We would expect more-involved donors to base their responses on the central arguments in the appeal. Involvement itself is not generally understood to be a direct determinant of purchase. Rather, it influences attention and the type of message that will effectively persuade a potential buyer.

Cause involvement is likely to be one of the most important determinants of whether people pay attention to a charity’s appeal. For instance, people who do not believe that homelessness is an important issue are unlikely to pay any attention to a solicitation for any shelter regardless of the specifics of the appeal. Cause involvement probably also affects attitude toward the appeal. Of course, involvement with a cause is not the only determinant of donation. Donors can be involved with a cause and still limit their donations. This might be because a prospective donor does not like a particular

appeal or a particular organization. Also, if a prospect recently donated to an organization, he or she might not respond to an additional appeal (Diamond and Noble, 2001).

Attracting attention is an essential construct in understanding advertising effectiveness (Bettman, 1979; Lynch and Srull, 1982). A great deal of charitable direct mail is designed to attract attention. Color pictures of unusual animals or teasers describing strange or important situations make the recipient stop and think. Attention to the envelope is likely to affect whether the recipient opens the envelope; attention to the appeal should affect whether the recipient intends to donate.

Attitude toward the ad has become one of the most important constructs in theories of advertising effectiveness. If people like advertisements, they are more likely to like the brand and consequently to have positive purchase intentions (Batra and Ray, 1986; Mackenzie, Lutz, and Belch, 1986; Madden, Allen, and Twible, 1988; Homer, 1990; Olney, Holbrook, and Batra, 1991). We can adapt attitude toward the ad to the charitable direct mail context by considering both attitude toward the envelope and attitude toward the appeal. Whether the respondent likes the envelope may affect whether he or she opens it. The copy, graphics, and design of the appeal may affect whether the recipient eventually donates.

Holbrook and Batra (1987) measured the emotional reactions to advertising. They found that a person's attitude toward the ad could be predicted by two factors: (1) whether viewing the ad gave them pleasure and (2) whether it increased their psychological arousal, as caffeine and stimulating experiences do. Appeals from nonprofits range from being cheerful to extremely upsetting. Some are arousing, and some are very bland. It seems reasonable to test whether envelopes and solicitations that score highly on these emotional dimensions are most effective.

Attitude toward the brand (Park and Young, 1986; Holbrook and Batra, 1987) is important in consumer marketing because people do not like all brands in a category equally. People are, of course, more likely to buy brands that they like than brands that they dislike. The analog to attitude toward the brand is attitude toward the charity. A person may have high involvement with a cause yet have a variety of attitudes about organizations related to that cause.

For instance, a person who believes that homelessness is an important domestic issue may prefer an organization that provides affordable housing to an organization that runs a shelter. Alternatively, a person may like a homeless shelter that serves families more than one that serves single men. People may have strong preferences among organizations with similar goals and methods of providing service.

The goal of many models of advertising effectiveness (Batra and Ray, 1986; Aaker, Stayman, and Hagerty, 1986; Mackenzie, Lutz, and Belch, 1986) is to understand whether other variables affect the

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consumer's intention to purchase the brand. The model shown in Figure 2 analogously attempts to explain what variables affect intention to donate to a particular charity. Our Solicitation Response Model helps clarify the psychological processes that lead an individual to the decision to respond to a charity's appeal with a donation.

We use a similar model to explain the intention to open the envelope. It makes sense to use analogous constructs: cause involvement, attention, emotional aspects of the envelope, attitude toward the envelope, and intention to open the envelope. But because people do not spend the same amount of time or effort evaluating envelopes as they do evaluating advertisements, we do not hypothesize that the attitude toward an envelope affects the attitude toward the related charity.

### **Segmenting Direct Mail Solicitations for Acquisition and Renewal Donors**

Authorities on direct mail solicitation (Gordon, 1989; Greenfield, 1996) emphasize the importance of segmentation in designing successful direct mail solicitations. Fundraisers generally start with two primary segments: the acquisition list and the renewal list. They send acquisition appeals to people who have not previously given to the charity. A good acquisition mailing often pulls a response of 2 percent or less. Previous research (Diamond and Noble, 2001) found that many donors are reluctant to give to a nonprofit unless it is on their written or mental list of approved charities. Attracting acquisition donors may take a special type of mailing. In contrast, renewal appeals to previous donors have higher response rates (Greenfield, 1996; Mail Communications Incorporated, 1996).

Although renewal donors are not necessarily more involved with the cause than are acquisition donors, we expect renewal donors to be more involved with the particular charity than new donors. We expect acquisition donors, consistent with the Elaboration Likelihood Model, to pay more attention to peripheral characteristics of the appeal, such as color or artwork, than do renewal donors. Thus, acquisition donors should react more to the emotional aspects of the appeal. Similarly, acquisition donors' decisions to donate should depend more on whether they like the appeal than should the decisions of renewal donors.

### **Applying the Solicitation Response Model to an Appeal from a Homeless Shelter**

We addressed three questions when we surveyed people who received a mailing from a homeless shelter:

Can we apply the Solicitation Response Model to understand why people open the envelope when they receive this charitable solicitation in the mail?

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Can we apply the model to explain intention to donate in response to this charity's appeal?

In what ways do response models differ for two segments: acquisition and renewal donors?

**Method**

We sent surveys to 389 households listed in the database of a homeless shelter. All households in the sample had previously received a mail solicitation from the shelter. The questionnaire was designed to answer our research questions with regard to that previous solicitation. Subjects received a cover letter accompanying a questionnaire designed as an eight-page brochure. Page one presented an introduction to the study and return address information. Page two gave directions and assessed information about cause involvement. The envelope containing the appeal was glued onto the third page of the questionnaire brochure. Questions about the envelope were on the same page. The appeal itself was pasted to cover the fourth page of the questionnaire. Page five (facing page four) contained questions about the appeal. Pages six and seven asked psychographic and demographic questions. The back cover of the questionnaire provided room for comments.

If two members of a household were listed in the homeless shelter database, we randomly addressed the survey to one of them. Both the cover letter and questionnaire explained that this was a confidential academic survey from a nonprofit center at a state university. Each household received two survey mailings to increase the survey response rate. The overall response rate was 43 percent (166 questionnaires). However, the response rate was substantially higher among households that had previously given to the shelter (51 percent) than among households that had not previously given (28 percent).

For the questionnaire, we developed multi-item scales to measure the constructs in Figure 2. These included measures of cause involvement, attention to the envelope, emotional reactions to the envelope (pleasure and arousal), attitude toward the envelope, intention to open the envelope, emotional reactions to the appeal (pleasure and arousal), attention to the appeal, attitude toward the appeal, attitude toward the nonprofit, and intention to donate. Table 1 lists the items used in each scale and reports reliabilities for each scale.

**Path Analysis**

Beginning with Figure 2, we used LISREL 8 to fit two path models to the survey data. The first (Figure 3) models intention to open the envelope, and the second (Figure 4) models intention to donate. Advertising researchers frequently use simultaneous equation models such as these to investigate psychological processes affecting consumer behavior. Path analysis allows researchers to develop more sophisticated explanations for why a particular advertisement or appeal affects or fails to affect behavior in a target audience. It provides a statistically

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*Can we apply the Solicitation Response Model to understand why people open the envelope when they receive this charitable solicitation in the mail?*

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Table 1. Scales Used in the Study

Scale	Items		Reliability ( $\alpha$ )
	1	7	
Cause involvement <sup>a</sup>	Unimportant Of no concern to me Not beneficial Trivial Means nothing to me A cause I would never give to The kind of charity I would never volunteer for <sup>a</sup>	Important <sup>§</sup> Of great concern to me Beneficial <sup>§</sup> Fundamental Means a great deal to me A cause I would definitely give to The kind of charity I would definitely be a volunteer for	.86
Emotional ratings of the envelope (pleasure) <sup>b</sup>	Depressed Unhappy Despairing	Cheerful <sup>§</sup> Happy <sup>§</sup> Hopeful <sup>§</sup>	.85
Emotional ratings of the envelope (arousal) <sup>b</sup>	Calm Sleepy Dull	Excited <sup>§</sup> Wide awake <sup>§</sup> Energized <sup>§</sup>	
Attention to the envelope <sup>b</sup>	I want to avoid this I want to turn my mind to other things I want to put this out of my mind	I want to give this attention <sup>§</sup> I want to concentrate on the appeal <sup>§</sup> I want to think about this charity now <sup>§</sup>	.89
Attitude toward the envelope <sup>b</sup>	I do not like the envelope I do not react favorably to the envelope I feel negative about the envelope	I like the envelope <sup>§</sup> I react favorably to the envelope <sup>§</sup> I feel positive about the envelope <sup>§</sup>	.96
Intention to open the envelope <sup>c</sup>	Strongly intend to throw it away Extremely unlikely to open it Strongly intend not to read contents	Strongly intend to open it <sup>§</sup> Extremely likely to open it <sup>§</sup> Strongly intend to read contents <sup>§</sup>	.96
Attention to the appeal <sup>d</sup>	Does not make me curious Boring Loses my attention	Makes me curious <sup>§</sup> Interesting <sup>§</sup> Keeps my attention <sup>§</sup>	.82
Emotional ratings of the appeal (pleasure) <sup>d</sup>	Not fun to look at Unpleasant Not enjoyable	Fun to look at <sup>§</sup> Pleasant <sup>§</sup> Enjoyable <sup>§</sup>	.79
Emotional ratings of the appeal (arousal) <sup>e</sup>	Calm Sleepy Dull	Excited <sup>a</sup> Wide awake <sup>§</sup> Energized <sup>§</sup>	
Attitude toward the appeal <sup>d</sup>	I dislike this appeal I react unfavorably to it I feel negative to it	I like this appeal <sup>§</sup> I react favorably to it <sup>§</sup> I feel positive about it <sup>§</sup>	.96
Attitude toward the charity <sup>f</sup>	I dislike this charity I react unfavorably to this charity I feel negative about this charity	I like this charity <sup>§</sup> I react favorably to this charity <sup>§</sup> I feel positive about this charity <sup>§</sup>	.97
Intention to donate <sup>f</sup>	I would never donate to this appeal I would definitely discard this appeal I would rather give to other appeals	I would surely donate to this appeal <sup>§</sup> I would definitely reply to this appeal <sup>§</sup> I would rather give to this appeal <sup>§</sup>	.92

<sup>a</sup>Rate charities that help homeless individuals.

<sup>b</sup>Fill in a circle to indicate how you feel about the envelope.

<sup>c</sup>If you received this envelope in the mail, how likely would you be to open it?

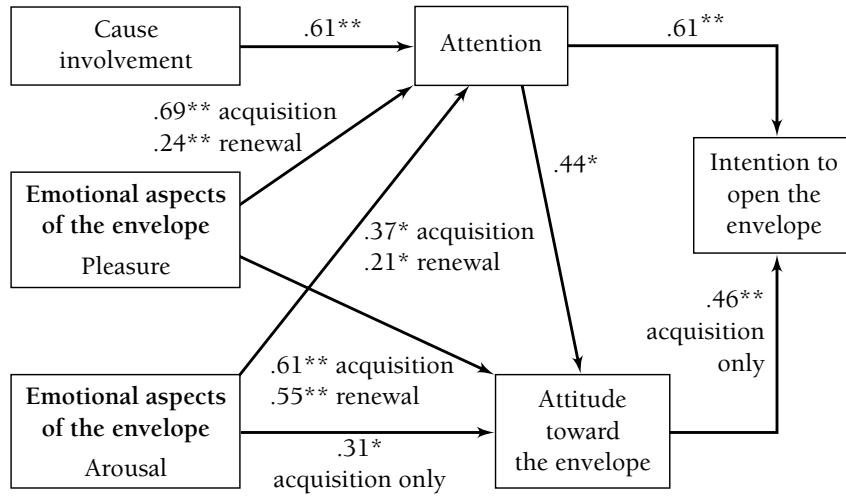
<sup>d</sup>Describe the appeal you just read.

<sup>e</sup>How did you feel when you read this appeal?

<sup>f</sup>Indicate your reactions below.

<sup>§</sup>Indicates that the item is reversed on the questionnaire.

Figure 3. Determinants of Intention to Open the Envelope

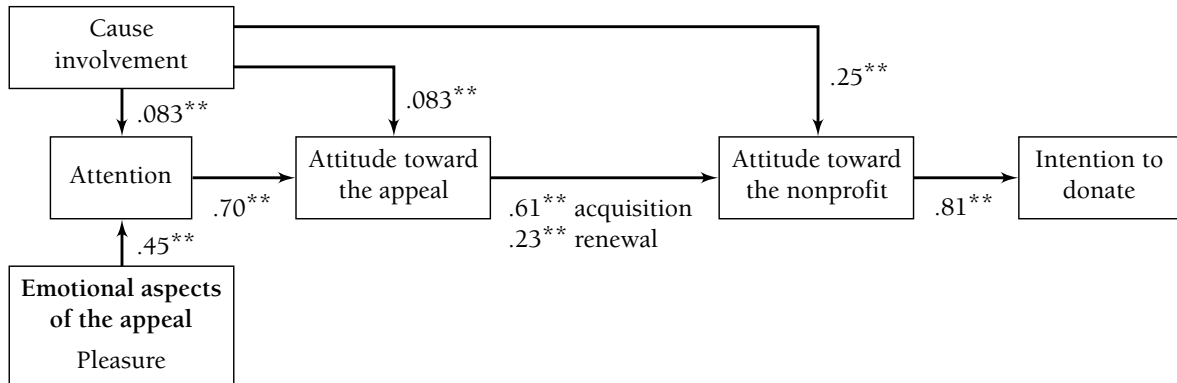


Note: Attitude toward the nonprofit was not included in this analysis. All other paths in the Solicitation Response Model were tested. A path from Attention to Intention to Open the Envelope was added due to an extremely high correlation. Nonsignificant paths are not depicted.

Interpreting coefficients: Path coefficients vary from 0 to 1, with larger numbers indicating strong relationships. When two path coefficients are reported, the paths differed for acquisition and renewal donors. When only one coefficient is reported, the paths are the same for acquisition and renewal donors. If paths for only acquisition donors are reported, renewal donor paths are not significant.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

Figure 4. Determinants of Intention to Donate



Note: Attitude toward the nonprofit was not included in this analysis. All other paths in the Solicitation Response Model were tested. A path from Attention to Intention to Open the Envelope was added due to an extremely high correlation. Nonsignificant paths are not depicted.

Interpreting coefficients: Path coefficients vary from 0 to 1, with larger numbers indicating strong relationships. When two path coefficients are reported, the paths differed for acquisition and renewal donors. When only one coefficient is reported, the paths are the same for acquisition and renewal donors. If paths for only acquisition donors are reported, renewal donor paths are not significant.

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efficient method for investigating complex relationships in which a dependent variable in one relationship subsequently becomes an independent variable in another postulated causal relationship (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993). In the models presented here, the size of path coefficients, which range from 0 to 1 in value, reflect the relative influence of one construct upon another within the overall context of explaining the respondent's intention to open the envelope or intention to donate. The estimated path model equations and significance tests for both models can be found in Tables 2 and 3.

Because path analysis is most reliable when no data is missing, we included in the data set used for a particular path model only subjects who completed all the scales needed to create that model. Therefore, we used data from 32 previous nondonors and 101 previous donors to create the model for opening the envelope. We used data from 28 previous nondonors and 95 previous donors to create the model for intention to donate.

Table 2. Path Analysis Results of LISREL Estimation:  
Model for Intention to Open the Envelope

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables		
	Attention	Attitude Toward the Envelope	Intention to Open the Envelope
Pleasure			
Acquisition donors	.69** (2.90)	.61** (2.77)	
Renewal donors	.24** (3.11)	.55** (5.57)	
Arousal			
Acquisition donors	.37* (1.94)	.31* (1.84)	
Renewal donors	.21* (1.66)	-.026 (-0.16)	
Cause involvement	.61** (3.34)	.005 (.13)	
Attention		.44** (4.35)	.61** (4.73)
Attitude toward the envelope			
Acquisition donors			.46** (2.36)
Renewal donors			.15 (1.55)
R <sup>2</sup>	.53 (acquisition) .24 (renewal)	.69 (acquisition) .42 (renewal)	.52 (acquisition) .26 (renewal)

Note: t-statistics are in parentheses under the coefficient estimates.  
\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Table 3. Path Analysis Results of LISREL Estimation:  
Model for Intention to Donate**

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables			
	Attention	Attitude Toward the Appeal	Attitude Toward the Charity	Intention to Donate
Pleasure	.45* (5.36)	.12 (1.41)		
Arousal	.11 (.95)	-.10 (-.99)		
Cause involvement	.083* (2.27)	.083* (2.48)	.25* (6.46)	
Attention		.70* (8.40)		
Attitude toward the appeal			.61* (4.49)	
Acquisition donors			.23* (2.63)	
Renewal donors				
Attitude toward the charity				.81* (11.94)
R <sup>2</sup>	.25	.50	.61 (acquisition) .38 (renewal)	.50

Note: t-statistics are in parentheses under the coefficient estimates.  
\**p* < .01.

## Results

### Intention to Open the Envelope

We adapted the model of donation behavior in Figure 2 to generate a path model of a potential donor's reactions toward the envelope. Because we believe that it is highly unlikely that attitude toward the envelope would substantially affect a person's enduring attitude toward the charity, we did not include attitude toward the charity in our model. We expected that previous donors and previous non-donors would differ according to whether or not their liking the envelope would increase their interest in opening the envelope. However, we first needed to test a general model that grouped both segments of donors together.

The empirical correlations in our data made it clear that our theoretical model of intention to open the envelope required a path between attention and intention to open the envelope. People are much more likely to want to open a solicitation envelope if it attracts their attention, and this effect is much stronger than what we find in traditional advertising contexts. We added an extra path, as shown in Figure 3, between attention and intention to open the envelope.

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*People are much more likely to want to open a solicitation envelope if it attracts their attention*

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Yet even with this extra path, we found that the model did not fit adequately if the path coefficients were constrained to be equal for both groups ( $\chi^2_{(15)} = 28.11, p < .05$ ). (Note: A significant  $\chi^2$  implies poor fit.)

A second analysis allowed several path coefficients to differ in the two groups. This was consistent with our belief that acquisition and renewal donors would react differently to a charitable solicitation. We relaxed constraints on the paths leading to attitude toward the envelope from its emotional components and leading to intention to open the envelope from attitude toward the envelope. These were the paths that we would expect to differ in the two groups, based on the interpretation of the Elaboration Likelihood Model. This model fits the data reasonably well ( $\chi^2_{(10)} = 17.2, p = .07$ ) and causes an improvement in model fit ( $\chi^2_{(5)} = 10.91, p = .053$ ). This model is presented graphically in Figure 3 and mathematically in Table 2.

Figure 3 indicates that emotional reactions to the envelope and attitude toward the envelope make much more of a difference to new donors than to renewal donors. For previous nondonors (acquisition donors), intention to open the envelope is strongly associated with a positive attitude toward the envelope. However, a positive attitude toward the envelope is less likely to make renewal donors open it. As well, the emotional components of the envelope more strongly influence attention and attitude toward the envelope for acquisition donors than for renewal donors.

For all potential donors, intention to open the envelope is heavily influenced by attention to the envelope. Attention is strongly related to the arousal stimulated by the envelope and the pleasurable features of the envelope. Again, the emotional reactions to the envelope are more important for new donors.

In our model, we expected cause involvement to influence attention and attitude toward the envelope. Cause involvement is significantly related to attention. However, cause involvement did not significantly influence attitude toward the envelope, which is again an important contrast with consumer responses in consumer advertising contexts.

### **Intention to Donate**

We used the model in Figure 2 as the basis for a path model that estimated the effect of specific variables upon intention to donate. This model fits adequately when the regression coefficients were constrained to be equal for both acquisition and renewal donors ( $\chi^2_{(26)} = 34.87, p = .11$ ). However, there were two reasons for performing a second analysis allowing some path coefficients to differ for acquisition and renewal donors: (1) we had a theoretical expectation of differences between these groups; (2) we had already found differences between these groups when we looked at the envelope data.

Unlike the envelope model, the only significant improvement in model fit ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 5.75, p < .05$ ) occurred when we allowed the relationship between attitude toward the appeal and attitude toward the charity to differ for acquisition and renewal donors. When we did this, the revised model fit very well ( $\chi^2_{(25)} = 29.12, p = .26$ ). Figure 4 presents this model.

Our results show that cause involvement and the appeal's attention-getting properties significantly influence the recipient's attitude toward the appeal. Consistent with our model, attitude toward the appeal in turn influences attitude toward the charity. Finally, attitude toward the charity directly affects intention to donate. It is important to note that attitude toward the appeal is not directly influenced by the emotional reactions to the appeal: arousal has no discernible effects upon intention to donate, and the pleasurable reactions to the appeal affects donation intention only by increasing attention toward the appeal. Although attitude toward the appeal significantly influences attitude toward the charity, it has more importance for previous nondonors than for renewal donors.

## Discussion

What have we learned by adapting an Advertising Response Model to the charitable donation context? First, we see much greater importance of liking the envelope and liking the appeal for acquisition donors than for renewal donors. Attitude toward the envelope is strongly and significantly related to intention to open the envelope—but only for acquisition donors. The emotional reactions to the envelope are also more important determinants of whether people will pay attention to the envelope and form a positive attitude toward the envelope. In short, it is very important to design an attractive and emotionally evocative appeal to get the first donation. To maximize returns for a given fundraising drive, fundraisers should probably allocate relatively more resources to designing acquisition appeals: making the envelope more pleasing, arousing, and attention-grabbing; and making the appeal itself more interesting and likable. Fundraisers should devote fewer resources to renewal donors, who are not likely to be influenced by a flashy envelope and are less likely to be influenced to donate simply because they like the appeal. Renewal donors have already been convinced to donate to the charity and are less affected by design features of the appeal than are acquisition donors.

Applying the Advertising Response Model has taught us a second thing: we have learned the factors we should measure if we want to know whether an envelope or appeal will be successful. The single strongest determinant of intention to open the envelope is attention. However, to understand whether an envelope will work, it is also important to measure constructs such as the recipient's attitude

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toward the envelope and the emotional reactions to the envelope. These constructs are especially illuminating if we are evaluating an acquisition mailing.

To use the Solicitation Response Model, a nonprofit professional designing an appeal could ask small samples of potential donors to rate a few versions of the envelope and appeal using the constructs in Figures 3 and 4. (The measurement scales appear in Table 1.) If one version of the appeal scored lower than other versions, it could be redesigned to increase pleasure or attention. More importantly, respondents could be asked why they did not like an appeal (if it scored low) or why they did not pay attention to it. The model then serves as a tool for diagnosing problems with various appeal designs.

To a certain degree, cause involvement determines whether people choose to open a solicitation when it comes in the mail. Cause involvement also has a weaker but significant effect upon a person's attitude toward the charity, which in turn affects intention to donate. Fundraising professionals can control this factor by buying the appropriate mailing lists and querying their own lists or by searching their databases to find donors who care about a particular cause.

### Research Limitations

This research has been exploratory in nature and was designed to provide practical help to administrators at a small homeless shelter with a limited fundraising budget. We had many trade-offs to consider in the design of this study, resulting in several limitations of our research findings. People on the homeless shelter's database filled out this survey at home. Considering the relatively high response rate to the survey (even from previous nondonors), we feel our respondents constituted an appropriate sample. If we had studied the response to such appeals in a laboratory setting, the people in our sample would have been less representative of actual potential donors.

However, survey respondents usually limit the amount of time they will spend answering questions. In order to keep the survey moderate in length yet useful for evaluating many constructs in a sophisticated model, we asked many questions about a single appeal. Studying only a single appeal poses questions about the generalizability of the model to other fundraising appeals.

Future research can validate the generality of this model in two ways. Studies of multiple appeals could use paid subjects to answer questions in a laboratory setting, much as consumer researchers have done in the past. Alternatively, other mailing list samples could be sent surveys regarding different appeals, replicating the study we report here.

A second limitation of the research was the use of intention measures (for example, intention to donate) rather than behavioral measures (such as actual donation). We chose to use intention

measures for one important reason: single occasion measures of behavior are notoriously unreliable. The only way to make behavioral measures more reliable is to aggregate a number of behaviors (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1974; Kirkpatrick, 1997; Weigel and Newman, 1976; Smith, Haugtvedt, and Petty, 1994; Shrum, Lowrey, and McCarty, 1995; Lastovicka and Joachimsthaler, 1988). Thus, a single donation occasion is unlikely to correlate highly with any measure, including future donation. Because single instances of donation are such unreliable measures, huge sample sizes are required to detect significant relationships between donation and other constructs. Using intention measures, we were able to develop models of the responses to envelopes and appeals with a reasonable sample size. These models provide deeper understanding of the donation process than a simple donation response rate. Future research with either multiple opportunities to donate or very large samples will be needed to investigate the relationship between intention measures and donation.

### Questions for Future Research

These results point the way toward developing an efficient procedure for evaluating direct mail solicitations. Before mailing alternative packages to large samples to look for small differences in response rates, we can use small samples to diagnose how alternative designs affect attention to the envelope and appeal, attitudes toward the envelope and appeal, attitude toward the charity, and intention to donate. The scales that we present in this article have demonstrated good reliability and can be easily adapted to evaluate a wide variety of nonprofit direct mail appeals. We therefore expect that adapting advertising methods for pretesting appeals from charities will be both efficient and effective.

We also hope that this research could be expanded to investigate other forms of nonprofit mail solicitation. Can advertising models help us better understand the success of integrated solicitation packages that go beyond a single mailing? Might premiums affect previous donors differently than nondonors? Would model results be different with a different mailing list? These are questions that can be answered through further use of the approach we have identified.

In consumer marketing, emotional aspects of the ad strongly determine the viewer's attitude toward the ad and the ad's effectiveness. If the ad is pleasant, people like it and are more likely to buy. The current research indicated that emotional aspects of a charity's appeal do not directly determine attitude toward the appeal. Why is this so? Solicitations may work if they are pleasant, but an unsettling solicitation can be very powerful, depicting an unpleasant situation that spurs the recipient to action. Thus, there may be limits to the applicability of current consumer research models to the domain of

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nonprofit appeals. Future research will have to refine these models and scales to increase their explanatory power in the context of charitable solicitations.

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