UNIT ASKING

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Hsee, Zhang, Lu & Xu (2013). *Psychological Science*
Background and Overview

Fundraising is costly ($50b to raise $300b annually).

We introduce a virtually costless method to boost donations.

It involves no deception or coercion.

It applies to fundraisers for a group with $N$ needy persons.

It works for both paper-based and web-based fundraisers.
Theoretical Basis

Initial scope insensitivity
+
Subsequent scope consistency
Roadmap

- **Study 1: Method and Effect**
- **Study 2: Field Experiment**
- **Study 3: Extension**
- **Other applications**
A local kindergarten has 20 needy children like the one as pictured.
They need your donation to buy Christmas gifts for them.
Two between-Ps conditions

1. Control condition:

2. Unit-asking condition:
Two between-Ps conditions

1. Control condition:

Think about all of the 20 children. How much are you willing to donate to help these 20 children? $____

2. Unit-asking condition:
Two between-Ps conditions

1. Control condition:

Think about all of the 20 children. How much are you willing to donate to help these 20 children? $____

2. Unit-asking condition:

Before deciding how much to donate to help these 20 children, first think about one such child and answer a hypothetical question: How much would you donate to help this child? $____

Think about all of the 20 children. How much are you willing to donate to help these 20 children? $____
Control

Unit Asking

$18

For

20
Control

For 20

Unit Asking

For 1

18

15
Control

For 20: $18

Unit Asking

For 1: $15
For 20: $49
Recap

Capitalizes on both scope-insensitivity and scope-consistency

Involves no deception or coercion

Different from the “foot in the door” and the “identifiable victim” effects
Roadmap

• Study 1: Method and Effect

• Study 2: Field Experiment

• Study 3: Extension

• Other applications
Annual fundraiser to help 40 students in elementary school the Company sponsored after the 2008 earthquakes

Email sent to all employees (about 800) to encourage donations via a designated website

Within one week, 320 visited the website.

Unbeknownst to visitors, the website had two versions: control and unit-asking.

Most of web visitors donated; % did not significantly differ between the two conditions (54% vs. 62%)

Could revise before submission; only final amount was recorded.
Control

Unit Asking

RMB

For 40

315

For 1

For 40

601
Roadmap

• Study 1: Method and Effect
• Study 2: Field Experiment
• Study 3: Extension
• Other applications
• Scope insensitivity as a common issue in donations

• Unit-asking can **increase scope sensitivity**

• Study design (2 x 2):
  – Scope: 10 children vs. 100 children
  – Method: control vs. unit-asking
For 10
For 1
For 10
For 100
For 1
For 100
Recap

Uses scope-insensitivity to fight scope-insensitivity
Scope

Unit-Asking for Group

Unit-Asking for One

Control for Group

Donation

10

100

Scope
Unit-Asking for Group

Unit-Asking for One

Control for Group

Scope

Donation

10 100
Roadmap

• Study 1: Method and Effect

• Study 2: Field Experiment

• Study 3: Extension

• Other applications
• Auction

• Research Proposal

• “Rocket Effect”? 
A small question makes a big difference