

Why to Give “A Small Kindness” : Exploring Motivations for Online Philanthropy after the Noto Earthquake

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1. Introduction

On the first day of January, a magnitude 7.6 earthquake struck the Noto Peninsula and took away 245 lives (MLIT 2024). Local residents in the area started their new year with worry, anxiety, and sorrow. Japanese citizens across the country spent their evening in front of screens and paid close attention to the news about the Noto Peninsula. Many of them wondered how they should provide support. Japan and her citizens are no strangers to disasters, especially earthquakes. Within the next few days, companies and organizations would start a wide range of charitable donation campaigns. Yet, it is noteworthy that *Yahoo Kikin* started its online donation campaign on *Yahoo-donation.com* as early as January 1st and quickly collected 5 million yen as of 21:20 that day¹. In the end, this campaign alone collected a total amount of 1.72 billion Japanese yen. Of course, this amount is just a drop in the bucket when compared with the 28.9 billion yen collected by the Japanese Red Cross Society (2024, 1, as of

April 8th) for the Noto Earthquake. However, for example, when compared with the amount of money collected by all three convenience store chains – 832 million yen in total², the 1.72 billion yen collected by *Yahoo Kikin* is not small. Obviously, *Yahoo-donation.com*, as one of the largest online donation platforms in Japan, along with its *Yahoo Kikin* project, has played an increasingly important role in disaster relief efforts.

Though a fair number of donors still donate by sending remittances, online philanthropy³ is growing more popular. It is necessary to focus on this online philanthropy for three reasons. First, online philanthropy has the potential to become more popular. Second, many donors give “small kindnesses.” The average amount of individual donations to *Yahoo Kikin*’s campaign might be small⁴, but the total amount collected from these individual donations is still important. Third, online platforms offer new data to be analyzed, providing a chance to fill in previ-

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ous research gaps. For these reasons, it is critical to understand how donors are driven to donate online. To explore donors' motivations, this research focused on *Yahoo Kikin's* online donation campaign for the Noto Earthquake, collecting and analyzing 3,150 comments taken from the comment section of this campaign website. Based on an inductive thematic analysis, my

2. Literature Review

Though Japan has long suffered from natural disasters, it might be a surprise for many that the history of philanthropy is not long. In *Giving Japan 2021 (Kifu Hakusho 2021)*⁵, Masataka Uo, the CEO of the Japan Fundraising Association (JFRA 2021, 9) mentioned that the year 1995 (the Great Hanshin Earthquake) was known as “the first year of the volunteerism” (*borantia-gan'nen*) and the year 2011 (the Great East Japan Earthquake) was known as “the first year of donation” (*kifu-gan'nen*). Thus, in the light of such a narrative, the history of philanthropy is only around 30 years. Considering this short history, most scholars would point to the lack of religious culture. For example, Ouchi (2004, 39) explores why Japan has only a weak culture of charitable giving when compared with Western countries. One reason is the lack of religious beliefs. Okuyama and Yamauchi's (2015, 404) explanation of the history of philanthropy in Japan is different. They argue that history can be traced back to the 7th

research summarized four motivations that motivated people to donate to the Noto Earthquake: (1) the possible balance of costs and psychological benefits; (2) the surrounding environment; (3) the awareness of needs due to social ties; (4) the prosocial value of indirect reciprocity.

century and Buddhist monks played an active role. Yet, they also admit that the year 1995 marked a boom in volunteerism. In any event, clearly, major disasters, as important focusing events, draw public attention to relevant social issues (Birkland 1997, 3). Besides, these disasters can possibly entail a shared identity based on a sense of common fate (Drury 2012, 201). The 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake and the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake are the deadliest disasters for Japan since the end of WWII. Thus, it is no surprise that Japanese people showed a strong willingness to help and give.

Here, focusing on the academic discussion on “helping” and “giving,” one of the most significant differences is the clear presence/absence of a beneficiary (Bekkers & Wiepking 2011, 925). Though both “helping” and “giving” might be considered more or less altruistic, helping usually has a target. Charitable giving often lacks a clear beneficiary. In a few cases, donors

might share social ties with their recipients. Yet, normally, donors' charitable giving is a one-shot interaction. Based on such an understanding, Bekkers and Wiepking (2007, 2011, 2020) write a series of literature reviews on charitable giving to make sense of underlying mechanisms by gathering wisdom from diverse disciplines. They point out that scholars from many backgrounds, "including marketing, economics, social psychology, biological psychology, neurology and brain sciences, sociology, political science, anthropology, biology, and evolutionary psychology," show interest in this topic (Bekkers & Wiepking 2011, 924). Indeed, though there is an increasing number of papers that adopt an interdisciplinary approach (Bekkers & Wiepking 2020, 1), research focuses still vary. For example, articles with a marketing background tend to provide recommendations on the development of successful donation campaigns for service providers (e.g., Chen et al. 2019; Wang et al. 2019; Hou et al. 2021); articles with a communication background are interested in how humanitarian communication by NGOs may effectively arouse empathy (e.g., Chouliaraki 2013); while articles with a psychology background are likely to center around donors' identity, experience, and values (e.g., Ottoni-Wilhelm, Estell, & Perdue 2014; Zagefka & James, 2015; Zagefka 2017).

Considering the interdisciplinary nature of this research field, to ensure the comparability of my research and extant literature, I rely on

Bekkers and Wiepking's (2011) review. Based on an examination of more than 500 papers from diverse disciplines, the two authors summarize eight mechanisms that might influence charitable giving: "(a) awareness of need; (b) solicitation; (c) costs and benefits; (d) altruism; (e) reputation; (f) psychological benefits; (g) values; (h) efficacy" (Bekkers & Wiepking 2011, 924). There might be other mechanisms. For instance, recent articles focus on donors' trust in the Internet, online platforms, and donation projects (Sura, Ahn, & Lee 2017; Chen et al. 2019; Hou et al. 2021). Trust might be understood as a part of efficacy. Yet, these two concepts are still different. Moreover, among the eight mechanisms, one mechanism might influence another. For one donation behavior, multiple mechanisms might run simultaneously; for one donor, a mix of mechanisms might change over time (Bekkers & Wiepking 2011, 944).

Returning to the context of Japan, as elsewhere, older people tend to donate more often. People with more wealth are more likely to donate. Females donate more frequently than males. However, on average, males donate more money per donation (JFRA 2021). In addition, university students with previous donation experiences or with parents who have volunteer experiences are more likely to donate (Cho 2018, 101). For my research, two previous studies are most relevant. One study by Sasaki (2019) investigated whether donors mimic a perceived majority contribution by examining

actual donations on *JapanGiving*⁶. Sasaki's results show a quasi-echo-chamber effect: donors imitated the amount of money that they considered most others were donating (Sasaki 2019, 36). Yet, this research only focuses on the amount of money instead of people's rationales. Another study comes from Daimon and Atsumi (2018). Daimon and Atsumi (2018, 701) propose a "pay-it-forward" network and identify a "survivors-turned-volunteers" pattern to explain Japanese individuals' intention to provide volunteer support. Some survivors of previous disasters decide to engage in volunteer activities and support others due to the experience of being supported. This paper shows a potential to understand indirect reciprocity in altruistic behavior (Daimon & Atsumi 2018, 702; see also Nowak & Sigmund 2005, 1291). However, Nowak and Sigmund (2005) have argued that reputation building is one major motivation that people have when engaging in indirect reciprocity. Obviously, this is not the case for Japan. Yet, Daimon and Atsumi pay most attention to their "pay-it-forward" network instead of trying to communicate with previous literature and provide a further explanation.

In short, previous literature has provided valuable insights into our understanding of charitable giving. However, there remain at least two questions unanswered. First, there is

a lack of studies that attempt to link willingness to give and actual giving. Most previous studies have either adopted the method of experiment or survey. Yet, in experiments and surveys, respondents might tend to present themselves in a positive light. Also, it is difficult to confirm whether self-proclaimed willingness can promise actual giving (Sun, Zagefka, & Goodwin 2013, 153). Second, there is a hidden hierarchy of donors and receivers. Only a few previous studies on blood donation have touched upon the discussion of reciprocal fairness (Ferguson, Edwards, & Masser 2021, 89). Of course, charitable giving usually is a one-shot interaction. However, if there is "indirect reciprocity" in volunteer activities in Japan (Daimon & Atsumi, 2018), is it also a factor in charitable giving? In this light, by examining comments left immediately after online donations, my paper hopes to answer three research questions in the Japanese context to figure out how people were motivated to give for the Noto Earthquake:

- (1) What kind of rationales did donors mention in their online comments?
- (2) How did donors make sense of their online donations?
- (3) How did donors make sense of their relationship with donation recipients?

3. Data and Method

This research collected comments taken from the comment section of *Yahoo Kikin's* donation campaign for the Noto Earthquake. Only comments posted while the donation campaign was active (2024/01/01-2024/03/31) have been included. All data are publicly available⁷. Only the content of these comments was examined. It should be acknowledged that it was difficult to confirm that all comments were made by people who made donations. Everyone (even without donating) could add a comment. No data associated with commenters' actual donation amounts or frequencies have been displayed on the website. Thus, it is impossible to know their actual donation conditions. Yet, it should be reasonable to presume that most people who left a comment at least made some charitable donations to the campaign. Also, it should be acknowledged that there might be an echo chamber effect among actual donors. Just like donors imitating the behavior of others and attempting to match a perceived reasonable amount of money (Sasaki 2019, 36), it is likely that donors might post comments that they consider suitable. But even so, I would like to argue that these online comments still provide a precious chance for researchers to explore donors' immediate response after real-world donations.

My paper conducted an inductive thematic analysis of comments based on the six-phase

guidance by Braun and Clarke (2006). The six phases include: familiarizing with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and finishing the report (Braun & Clarke 2006, 87). First, to develop an initial impression, the author manually collected and downloaded all 3,160 comments after reading each of them. Nine comments were excluded because they were either written in Chinese or English or included only Emoji characters. One comment was excluded because the content was completely irrelevant. Thus, 3,150 comments were uploaded to NVivo 14 for further analysis. Second, the author conducted a line-by-line coding and generated initial codes after re-reading the comments. Most comments only included short condolence, encouragement, or invocation. However, some comments included self-report rationales. In this phase, 31 initial codes were generated⁸. Third, the author searched for themes that might explain motivations for online charitable giving. The inductive thematic analysis in this paper was largely data driven. Yet, as Braun and Clarke put it, "researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum" (Braun & Clarke 2006, 84). To ensure the comparability of this research and extant literature, the author frequently compared potential themes with the

eight mechanisms summarized by Bekkers and Wiepking (2011, 924). Finally, my research found that three mechanisms were comparatively salient: awareness of need, costs/benefits, and value. Besides, it was noticed that charita-

ble giving was not always based on conscious reasoning. There might be random extrinsic factors that exert an unconscious influence on people's ideas and behavior. In this paper, I summarized these extrinsic factors under the

Table 1: List of Themes and Codes⁹

Theme	Code	Example
Costs and benefits	Benefit of one-click donation	Online fundraising is very convenient.
	Benefit of the point system	It's OK to think that I never received any points. It feels like the "tears of a sparrow", but I decided to donate all my points.
	Usage of the point system	I donated all my T-points. Please accept 10 points.
Social environment	Family members	I made the donation due to the suggestion of my son.
	SNS opinion leader	I learned about the project via HIKAKIN's YouTube videos and other influencers' SNS.
	Japanese new year	Since the beginning of this New Year, it is really heartbreaking.
Awareness of need	Affection	Ishikawa prefecture is my favorite prefecture. I could even consider it as my hometown.
	Acquaintance	I can't contact my friends. I can only pray for them. There's nothing I can do. Powerlessness.
	Geographic proximity	I am a resident of a neighboring prefecture.
	Hometown	Ishikawa Prefecture is my father's hometown. For me, it is also my second hometown, full of fond memories.
	Local experience	I went on a trip to Ishikawa Prefecture two years ago. I still remember being moved by seeing the morning markets and black houses in Noto.
Value: indirect reciprocity	Great East Japan Earthquake	I live in Miyagi. I received a lot of support from the people of Hokuriku during the Great East Japan Earthquake.
	Hanshin Earthquake	I experienced the Great Hanshin Earthquake 28 years ago. I cannot think it is unrelated to me.
	Kumamoto Earthquake	I was affected by the Kumamoto Earthquake. Reconstruction is still progressing thanks to the support of donations from many people.
	Other disasters	During the Chuetsu Earthquake, my family were indebted to a nurse M, who was dispatched by the Ishikawa Prefecture Nurse Association. To the best of my ability, I will donate as much as I can.
	Returning the favor	When we were affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake, we received help from many different people. It is a small amount only, but a return of favor
	I might need help next time	Nowadays, an earthquake can occur anywhere in Japan. I don't think it's unrelated to me. So I made this small donation.

theme of “social environment.” Overall, as shown in Table 1, four themes were deter-

mined.

4. Research Findings

4.1 Reduced perceived cost and potential psychological benefits

One central feature of donation is that “giving money costs money” (Bekkers & Wiepking 2011, 932). Interestingly, people do not always feel upset due to a loss of money. For example, in East Asian societies, many people are willing to give coin offerings in temples and shrines to express respect for gods. This represents a typical balance of monetary costs and psychological benefits. Returning to the discussion about charitable giving, my research noticed that the popular culture of loyalty points in Japan has influenced people’s perception of costs. In the words of Han (2022, 536), “Consumers also consider a product was given as part of a promotion as ‘free’ and the loss of the product does not bother them.” From the comments, there is a clear sign that many felt glad that they could use points for donations. In a few cases, people who left comments mentioned that they intentionally kept their points for donation. However, as we experience in everyday life, points usually play a rather dispensable role. Several comments describe T-points as dormant or not useful. For example,

- o The T-points that I always miss the proper timing to use. I just made this donation.

In one previous article, Okina (2022, 123) asks the question “are loyalty points Japan’s corporate pseudo-currency”? This “pseudo-currency” is exactly the proper term to capture a donor’s perception of loyalty points. Loyalty points could be used for charitable giving at a low perceived cost. Against such a backdrop of low perceived costs, some donors tried to “do something” instead of being an entire bystander. Previous literature suggests that the bystander effect in donations happens when people assume that other people are actively giving and feel that the responsibility to help is diffused (Zagefka et al. 2012, 222). However, from these comments, it is shown that some Japanese donors still felt a moral responsibility to donate regardless of the obvious fact that they should know that some donors gave large amounts of money. Though it might be argued that smaller amounts of money are still a sign of the bystander effect, regardless of the size of donations, they did donate. This phenomenon might be caused by potential psychological benefits that donors might get. These psychological benefits include an alleviation of the sense of guilt of being an entire bystander and an enjoyment of the “joy of giving” (Bekkers &

Wiepking 2011, 938). One comment said the following:

- o It is really a small amount of money. But an act of hypocrisy is better than a kindness of doing nothing” (*yara nai zen yori, yaru gizen*).

4.2 Push factors associated with the surrounding social environment

Most previous studies tend to adopt an individualistic perspective when examining charitable giving. This research, however, highlights that the surrounding social environment might exert a pushing influence, usually in an unconscious way. I identified influences from three sources. The first push factor is associated with the influence of family members, especially children in the household. Giving Japan 2021 shows that individuals with children usually have a stronger tendency to donate (JFRA 2021, 30). Yet, it remains unclear how the family structure with children influences individuals. Research findings from the comments suggest that charitable behavior changes might be driven by children. For example,

- o My kids also watched the news and asked if the situation was okay when it was still so cold. [They also asked] if there was enough food. Even as children, they can feel the situation was dire and asked whether I could do something. Then, I looked into it and found that the disaster-affected area does not accept donations from individ-

In this way, my research suggests that a delicate balance of costs and benefits might exist when people mentally budget their charitable giving. Also, it suggests a possibility that psychological benefits could be a stronger motive when the perceived cost is small enough.

uals for reasons due to the lack of manpower. So, I decided to donate, even if it was just a small amount. My kids also took out their New Year’s money. I was moved by their words.

Usually, due to ethical considerations, children and teenagers aged under 18 are not included as survey respondents. Yet, this research has shown that at least some donations must be understood by incorporating the knowledge of how children participate in family life.

The second push factor is associated with online opinion leaders. These opinion leaders not only direct people’s attention to donation campaigns but also help alleviate concerns about the trustworthiness of online campaigns. 14 comments mentioned that they watched YouTuber HIKAKIN’s video and came to Yahoo’s donation website. There is no denying that HIKAKIN might intend to use his video and donation for a better reputation. As Bekkers and Wiepking (2011, 937) put it, “Merely knowing that one’s contribution is perceived by others may be enough to motivate people to

give.” Yet, videos made by online opinion leaders bridged the gap between streaming media platforms and online donation campaigns. For example, HIKAKIN’s video¹⁰ used a split view function and illustrated how HIKAKIN donated to *Yahoo Kikin*’s campaign.

The last push factor is related to the timing of the earthquake. As in almost all countries, New Year is one of the most important holidays for family members to gather. The drastic contrast between holiday cheer and disaster suffering constitutes the “uniqueness” of the Noto Earthquake, thereby prompting Japanese citizens to act. As stated in one comment,

- o Just thinking about an earthquake like this occurring on New Year’s Day, when relatives gather together as they

return home from the cities and grandparents spend heartwarming time together with their grandchildren, makes me feel deep sadness as if it happened to myself.

It is debatable whether influences from these three sources can all be understood as the influence of the social environment. Also, there should be a better definition of the social environment in the context of charitable giving. Yet, that would be beyond the scope of this paper. By mentioning social environment, I mainly tried to emphasize one point: in presupposed virtual settings (such as experiments and surveys), many extrinsic factors, which largely exert an unconscious influence on donors, might have been ignored.

4.3 Improved awareness of needs due to social ties

Previous research has shown that donors tend to show an increasing level of willingness to donate when they have more knowledge of one disaster-affected area (Zagefka et al. 2013, 640). This knowledge facilitates the possibility “to imagine and form a mental image of the victims and to picture their plight” (Zagefka et al. 2013, 642-643). Research findings from the comments confirm that knowledge plays a critical role in charitable giving. In particular, knowledge based on social ties enhance both donors’ willingness and their ability to imagine disaster victims’ suffering. As shown in Table 1, this paper identified at least five types of im-

portant social ties: (1) genuine affection for the disaster-affected area; (2) close acquaintances who live in the area; (3) citizens’ geographic proximity to the disaster-zone; (4) nostalgia for the hometown or one parent’s hometown; (5) previous pleasant experience in the disaster-affected area. All these types of social ties make it easier to imagine victims’ daily routines and current plight. For example,

- o At the end of this year, I traveled to Ishikawa and Toyama prefectures and took the last train back to Tokyo on New Year’s Eve. The next day, a major earthquake occurred. I am so heartbro-

ken that the land where I was breathing air until yesterday is now in dire straits.

For donors, it was heartbreaking to imagine that the people they knew were suffering. They were disheartened to consider that the place where they had traveled was in dire straits. In addition, though knowledge based on social ties here primarily refers to past connections, future connections might also exert an influence. A few comments mentioned scheduled trips to the Ishikawa Prefecture:

- o Actually, my partner and I were planning to go on a trip to Kanazawa City today. Although only a small amount, I

donated a portion of our scheduled travel expenses.

However, my paper raises a question about how the concept of knowledge should be used. Zagefka et al. (2013) investigate the influence of knowledge in general. They conducted three experiments to examine the hypothetical influence of general knowledge on the willingness to donate. Yet, my analysis based on donors' comments showed that the kind of knowledge that donors recalled was mostly based on actual social encounters. These actual encounters aroused people's empathy, thereby leading to an improved awareness of the disturbance in victims' daily routines caused by the earthquake.

4.4 A unique prosocial value of indirect reciprocity

The last theme identified from the analysis is the unique prosocial value of indirect reciprocity. In the Japanese language, reciprocity is always connected with the saying "*otagaisama*." According to the *Jisho* Dictionary, "*otagaisama*" means "we are of equal status in this regard; we are in the same boat"¹. It represents a traditional Japanese value that has long been incorporated into slogans of volunteering activities and is understood as a symbol of the Japanese spirit of mutual aid (Ogawa 2004, 73). However, why is reciprocity so important? Nishide (2009, 7) argues that volunteers do not want to get direct benefits by helping but expect indirect benefits – someone else might help them in the future. Thus, in a long enough period, indirect

reciprocity could be established. Such an understanding of indirect reciprocity is slightly different from the understanding of biologists who argue that reputation is important for indirect reciprocity. Using the metaphor of "scratching," Nowak and Sigmund (2005, 1291) consider that "I will not get my back scratched if it becomes known that I never scratch anybody else's." Obviously, this is not the case for Japan.

In my paper, comments showed that there had been a combination of extant and potential indirect reciprocity, which was close to Nishide's (2009, 7) argument. People who had previous disaster-suffering experience or donation-receiving experience showed a strong willingness to donate to others. Many of these

comments (as shown in Table 1) talked about the value of mutual aid and specific past disasters. The three most frequently mentioned ones were the 1995 Hanshin Earthquake, the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, and the 2016 Kumamoto Earthquake. The actual suffering and receiving experience made it more possible for people to sympathize with the suffering due to the current disaster and understand the utility of donations. In this way, some donors felt that “I was helped, and I want to help this time”.

In addition, almost the whole of Japan remains susceptible and vulnerable to natural disasters. Thus, no citizens can avoid disaster risks. Even those citizens who have not personally experienced significant disasters also possess a reasonable amount of knowledge about disasters from textbooks and mass media. Zagefka (2017, 1) talks about the mentality of “it could have been me” and shows that such a counterfactual way of thinking increases donation proclivity. In the case of Japan, this paper

demonstrated a similar pattern. Some donors had the expectation that people who provide support this time might become sufferers when the next disaster occurs. For instance,

- o I live in Kochi prefecture. [People say that] the next earthquake will occur in the Nankai area. It is not unrelated to me.

In this sense, donors who experienced past disasters were “returning the favor” (ongaeshi). People who were more aware of future disaster risks were helping with the idea of “I help you. I might need help next time. Someone else might help me”. In this vein, I would like to extend Daimon and Atsumi’s (2018, 701) “pay-it-forward” network of volunteerism and use it to understand charitable giving. As shown in Figure 1, sufferers of past earthquakes received help from donors. During this process, some sufferers and donation-receivers become new donors who help others in subsequent disasters. Besides, some donors provide help with an ex-

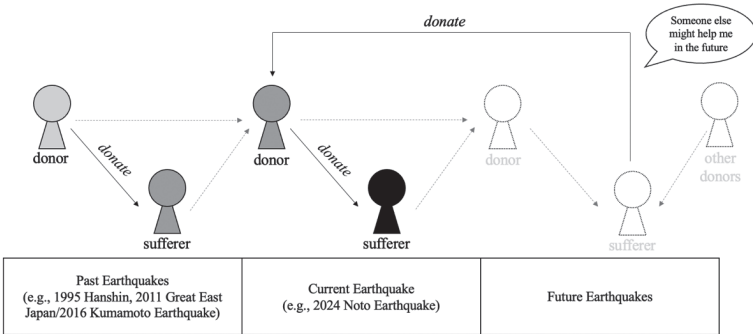


Fig. 1 Indirect reciprocity in charitable giving in Japan
 Source: Adapted from Daimon and Atsumi (2018, 701).

pectation of future help from someone else.

A latent key point here is that almost the entire Japan is prone to natural disasters. Thus, there will always be another disaster. Also, there will finally be another deadly disaster. In this way, the prevalent disaster experience in

Japan might predispose Japanese citizens towards a prosocial value of indirect reciprocity. Even without reputation as a mediating factor, people can expect mutual help: next time, it could be me.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on an inductive thematic analysis of online comments posted after donating, this research has provided abundant empirical evidence of donors’ self-proclaimed rationales for making donations. Moreover, it has explored how donors made sense of their online donations and their relationship with donation recipients. Overall, four themes were identified. First, the perceived cost of donating was partly

eased by loyalty point systems and online donation platforms. Meanwhile, as shown by the saying of “*yara nai zen yori, yaru gizen*”, some donors gave small kindnesses online to enjoy psychological benefits and alleviate the sense of guilt for not helping. Second, people were influenced unconsciously to donate by push factors from the surrounding social environment. This is different from so-called social pressure. In-

Table 2: Comparison to Bekkers and Wiepking’ s Eight Mechanisms

Themes in This Paper	Related Mechanism(s)
Reduced perceived cost and increased psychological benefits	Costs and benefits Psychological benefits
Push factors associated with the surrounding social environment	--- Solicitation (SNS opinion leaders) Reputation (SNS opinion leaders) Psychological benefits (family) Values (family) Efficacy (SNS opinion leaders) Moderating factor: situational condition (New Year)
Improved awareness of needs due to social ties	Awareness of needs Moderating factor: identification of a specific victim Moderating factor: perception of deservingness Moderating factor: social capital (Nishide 2009)
The unique prosocial value of indirect reciprocity	Values Awareness of needs Altruism

Source: Based on Bekkers and Wiepking’s (2011) eight mechanisms.

stead, it is related to the way people participate in family and daily life. Third, knowledge based on actual social encounters plays a critical role in enhancing people's awareness of victims' needs. Such knowledge propels people to imagine the disturbance in victims' daily routines and the suffering caused by disasters. Finally, the prevalence of disasters might predispose people in Japan towards a prosocial value of indirect reciprocity. Sufferers of past disasters might become new donors. Also, some people who provided help might have an expectation of receiving help from others in the future.

Focusing on the connection between my four findings and Bekkers and Wiepking's (2011) eight mechanisms, as mentioned previously, for one behavior, multiple mechanisms might operate simultaneously. Also, there could be other moderating factors. In Bekkers and Wiepking's paper (2011), they include an appendix discussing potential moderating factors (pp. 946-953). Based on a careful reading of this appendix and my findings, I have further summarized my comparison in Table 2. It could be found that other than the three main mechanisms – costs/benefits, awareness of need, and values – multiple other factors might have an impact. In this way, based on Table 2, I attempt to address previous relevant works and provide some directions for future studies. For example, considering the case of parents making donations as proxies for their children to donate, it might be interesting to study psychological benefits and

family values together. Considering the impact of famous people, it would be possible to compare the influence of SNS opinion leaders and the role of celebrities in cause advertising by combining perspectives of solicitation, reputation, and efficacy. Considering the potential balance between perceived costs and psychological benefits, it should be helpful to clarify when people tend to be indifferent bystanders and when people tend to prefer small psychological benefits in donations.

Before closing this part, I would like to point out four limitations of this research. First, this paper only analyzed 3,150 comments. Admittedly, the analysis might not be sufficiently representative. Besides, even if all comments were left by actual donors, we could know nothing about how much and how often they donated. Thus, other research methods, such as interviews or focus groups, would be effective in clarifying more details and further making sense of the interplay between people's willingness to give and actual giving. Second, people's understanding of the deservingness of victims and their willingness to give are influenced by the extent to which these people believe sufferers should be responsible for their misfortunes (Bekkers & Wiepking 2011, 947). Thus, donors' motivations to donate for natural disasters, non-natural disasters, and specific purposes might not be explained in the same way. Third, *Yahoo-donation.com* itself could be unique. It allows organizations to launch donation cam-

paigns. For example, other than *Yahoo Kikin's* campaign, there were more than 30 campaigns for the Noto Earthquake for various purposes (saving pets, helping children, managing vehicles, etc.). Other platforms might have a different business logic. Last, it is impossible to conclude that the four identified themes represent

the only factors that influence people's charitable behavior. For example, donors did not talk about efficacy probably because this campaign was launched shortly after the start of disaster relief operations. Yet, in the long run, donors might pay more attention to efficacy.

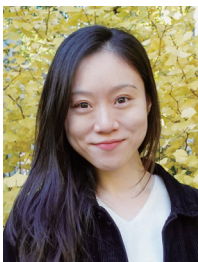
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- ¹ *Yahoo Kikin's* campaign for the Noto Earthquake imposed a "donate-the-same-amount" policy. For the first 5 million yen donated, LINE Yahoo Corporation would match the same amount. Thus, *Yahoo Kikin* disclosed on the website that as of 21:20 the campaign had already gathered 5 million yen.
- ² The data can be found on the official websites of the three chains.
- ³ Many companies combine their donation platforms with loyalty point systems. For example, in the case of Yahoo-donation.com, it accepts credit payments for donations of more than 100 yen and T-point donations of more than 1 point. Each T-point is converted to one Japanese yen in the donation process. This T-point system is one of the loyalty point systems in Japan. From April 22, 2024, the T-point system has been combined with another V-point system.
- ⁴ Author's calculation. The average amount per donation was 1849 yen. 925, 259 people made donations to the campaign.
- ⁵ *Giving Japan 2021* is the donation whitebook (*Kifu Hakusho*) published by the Japan Fundraising Association. To the best of my knowledge, *Giving Japan* includes the most comprehensive data about donation patterns in Japan. However, the definition of "kifu" in this material might be slightly different from the common understanding of "donation". For example, Furusato-tax (*Furusato-nozei*) is also included as a form of donation.
- ⁶ The business of *JapanGiving* was terminated in 2019 after it was transferred to LIFULL Social Funding.
- ⁷ Though *Yahoo-donation.com* does not display donation campaigns that are inactive, data can be accessed by the following URL: <https://donation.yahoo.co.jp/detail/1630064>. The comment function on *Yahoo-donation.com* is enabled by Facebook comments. Thus, comments have been influenced by users' Facebook activities. For this reason, the real-time number of comments might be slightly different from the number when the author collected data (2024/03/28-2024/04/01).
- ⁸ For readers' reference, the 31 initial codes include: (1) affection for the disaster-affected area, (2) benefits of one-click donation, (3) benefits of the T-point system, (4) condolence/encouragement/invocation, (5) experience of previous disasters-other, (6) experience of previous disasters-Great East Japan, (7) experience of previous disasters-Hanshin, (8) experience of previous disasters-Kumamoto, (9) future support-consumption, (10) future support-*Furusato Nozei*, (11) future support-travel, (12) it is better giving than not, (13) Japanese identity, (14) limitation of modern technology, (15) motivation-geographic proximity, (16) motivation-history, (17) motivation-hometown, (18) motivation-local experience, (19) motivation-people who they now, (20) motivation-travel experience, (21) pay a future obligation, (22) return a favor-*ongaeshi*, (23) small things that can be done (*biryoku nagara*), (24) supporting each other-*otagaisama*, (25) the impact of media, (26) the impact of SNS opinion leader, (27) the impact of family members, (28) uniqueness of the time (New Year), (29) uniqueness of the time (coldness), (30) usage of credit/debit cards, and (31) usage of the T-point system. Among these codes, other than #4 and #23, #1, #6, #19, #20, #21, #22, #28, and #31 appeared most frequently.
- ⁹ The examples are selected from donors' comments. The author translated these examples into English. Due to word constraints, only English translations of comments have been presented as evidence.
- ¹⁰ For readers' reference, this video can be accessed by using the following URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wt_uYs-7FQ1c. HIKAKIN's introduction of donation methods: 05:16-08:25.
- ¹¹ The definition can be found here: <https://jisho.org/search/%E3%81%8A%E4%BA%92%E3%81%84%E6%A7%98>.

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Why to Give “A Small Kindness” : Exploring Motivations for Online Philanthropy after the Noto Earthquake

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In recent years, online donation campaigns are gathering an increasing amount of money. People are encouraged to give “a small kindness” by using these channels. Especially in a disaster-prone country like Japan, these small kindnesses are important during times of disaster recovery. Besides, these kindnesses are proof of an active civil society. However, there remains a lack of studies in Japan regarding why people conduct charitable giving offline and online. Moreover, two questions remain understudied by extant literature. First, there is little understanding of the interplay between people’s intention to give and their actual actions. Second, most studies tend to neglect the influence of reciprocity in charitable giving.

To address these research gaps, my research conducted an inductive thematic analysis of 3,150 comments taken from the comment section of *Yahoo Kikin*’s donation campaign for the 2024 Noto Earthquake. It extracted initial codes from comments and identified potential themes. To ensure comparability with previous studies, it compared potential themes derived from data with eight mechanisms – “(a) awareness of need; (b) solicitation; (c) costs and benefits; (d) altruism; (e) reputation; (f) psychological benefits; (g) values; (h) efficacy” – that might influence charitable giving (Bekkers and Wiepking 2011, 924).

In sum, based on the case of *Yahoo Kikin*, four final themes associated with donors’ self-proclaimed rationales for making online donations for the Noto Earthquake were identified. First, the perceived cost of donating was partly eased by loyalty point systems and online donation platforms. Meanwhile, at least some donors provided donations for psychological benefits, such as alleviating the sense of guilt of being an entire bystander. Second, people were influenced to donate by push factors from the surrounding social environment. Third, knowledge based on actual social encounters enhances people’s willingness to imagine victims’ suffering and their awareness of victims’ needs. Last, the prevalence of disasters might predispose people in Japan towards a prosocial value of indirect reciprocity.

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Key Words : Charitable giving, Japan, Earthquake, Online philanthropy, Indirect reciprocity.