

This article is part of the issue on “Consumer Psychology for the Greater Good”

## When Cause-Marketing Backfires: Differential Effects of One-for-One Promotions on Hedonic and Utilitarian Products

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A remarkable cause-marketing (CM) strategy has emerged in the marketplace: businesses promise to donate an identical product for each product sold (i.e., a “one-for-one” promotion). Yet despite prosocial tendencies, consumers hesitate when uncertain about others’ preferences, which poses the question of whether one-for-one promotions are perceived to meet recipients’ preferences. Five experiments (one field experiment and four laboratory experiments) reveal that the efficacy of in-kind, one-for-one promotions varies as a function of product type. Specifically, one-for-one promotions enhance purchase intentions for utilitarian products but undermine purchase intentions for hedonic products. Moreover, this difference is due to certainty regarding recipients’ utilitarian preferences and uncertainty regarding recipients’ hedonic preferences. Importantly, hedonic products’ backfiring effects are attenuated when recipients’ preferences are perceived as homogeneous or the recipient is familiar to the donor. Collectively, these findings emphasize the importance of consumer inferences regarding recipients’ preferences in determining the efficacy of CM promotions that leverage in-kind benefits while elucidating the role of product type in the effectiveness of these promotions.

**Keywords** Cause-marketing; Charitable giving; Hedonic; Persuasion; Utilitarian

As companies continue to pursue new ways of achieving marketing objectives through the support of social causes (i.e., *cause-related marketing*; Barone, Miyazaki, & Taylor, 2000), a successful cause-related marketing (CM) strategy has emerged in the marketplace where businesses promise an in-kind donation for each product sold (i.e., a “one-for-one” promotion). The promotion’s mechanics are simple: for every product sold, a company donates the same product to charity. Real-world examples suggest this promotion is highly successful. For instance, TOMS Shoes, which donates one pair of shoes for each sold, has gone from a start-up to worth more than a half-billion dollars in 10 years (Isaza & Italie, 2016). Indeed, companies ranging in size from small (BOGO Bowl) to large (Walgreen’s)

have adopted one-for-one promotions as a way to invest in social change while increasing product evaluations (e.g., Gupta & Pirsch, 2006), enhancing brand image (e.g., Xie & Keh, 2016), and improving financial performance (e.g., Arora & Henderson, 2007).

While *one-for-one* promotions are becoming increasingly common (Hamby, 2016; Marquis & Park, 2014), the promotion makes a critical presumption about consumer psychology—namely that individuals will always want to help others, absent the incurrance of any personal cost. This may only be true in part, as many factors influence donation decisions, such as consumers’ mindset at the time of donation (Haruvy & Leszczyc, 2009; Winterich & Barone, 2011) and characteristics of the company and charitable cause (Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006; Gupta & Pirsch, 2006). Consequently,

Received 30 July 2019; accepted 31 January 2021  
Available online 19 February 2021

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DOI: 10.1002/jcpy.1229

one could imagine a company's intention to donate an in-kind product might have no effect or even undermine consumer purchase decisions.

In this research, we examine how inferences regarding donation recipients' preferences influence the efficacy of one-for-one promotions, with implications for in-kind CM strategies more broadly. CM strategies like one-for-one promotions implicitly involve matching the preferences of unknown individuals (e.g., beneficiaries freely receiving a flu shot or pair of shoes). We propose that high levels of uncertainty regarding others' preferences can cause consumers to avoid purchase decisions. Further, we propose that consumers infer others' preferences based, in part, on the type of product donated (i.e., utilitarian vs. hedonic; Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994).

Specifically, one-for-one promotions should be more persuasive when paired with products that similarly satisfy most people's preferences (satisfying needs) but less persuasive when paired with products that satisfy unique preferences (satisfying pleasures). Moreover, we contend that these inferences regarding recipient preferences vary distinctly as a function of product type. Consequently, one-for-one promotions associated with utilitarian products should heighten persuasion via certainty in fulfilling functional needs, whereas one-for-one promotions associated with hedonic products should undermine persuasion via uncertainty in fulfilling hedonic pleasures.

Five experiments (one field experiment and four lab experiments) provide evidence in support of this novel framework of one-for-one promotions and thus contribute to the literatures on product type, charitable giving, and CM. Indeed, we show that consumers are certain about matching recipients' homogeneous utilitarian preferences but uncertain about matching recipients' heterogeneous hedonic preferences. This difference, in turn, alters the efficacy of one-for-one promotions. In doing so, this research: (a) demonstrates the role of product type in dictating the efficacy of one-for-one promotions, (b) details the role of consumers' inferences regarding recipient preferences in driving this differential efficacy, and (c) offers a platform to understand when and why one-for-one promotions (and related CM initiatives) can persuade as well as backfire.

### **The Role of Recipient Preferences in Charitable Giving**

Consumers have many opportunities to donate to strangers, ranging from retail point-of-sale requests

where the donation and product are bundled to personal pleas on crowdfunding platforms. Yet, consumers' responses to these donation opportunities are not the same (e.g., Giebelhausen, Lawrence, & Chun, 2020). Indeed, a wealth of research delineates the multitude of factors that shape the way consumers respond to opportunities for charitable giving (see Gautier & Pache, 2015).

First, consumer motives are critical. Consumers are more likely to donate in general if they are altruistic (Haruvy & Leszczyc, 2009) or construe themselves as interdependent (Winterich & Barone, 2011). Additionally, consumers prefer some control over the charity selected to receive a donation (Arora & Henderson, 2007; Kull & Heath, 2016; Robinson, Irmak, & Jayachandran, 2012) and will use monetary donations as an excuse to rationalize frivolous purchases (Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998). Second, company motives matter. Specifically, consumers are more likely to donate when a company seems more altruistic and values-driven (vs. motivated by shareholder value or self-interest; Ellen et al., 2006). Finally, the selected cause matters. Consumers will donate more when the company and the charitable cause have a high degree of perceptual fit (i.e., can be fluently processed; Gupta & Pirsch, 2006). The present investigation builds on this body of research by positing that the *recipient also matters* when considering how consumers respond to donation opportunities.

Recipient preference is an important facet of the donation decision given the wide array of options companies have for engaging in different CM strategies. Indeed, the majority of prior research has focused on strategies that involved the giving of money, either given directly or as a donated portion of product revenue (for a review, see Table 1 in Appendix S1). However, money is fungible, and companies are now experimenting with alternative donation strategies that go beyond the mere giving of money. These alternative strategies include donations of time and effort (e.g., Kappes, Sharma, & Oettingen, 2013) and, increasingly, in-kind product donations. As noted, in-kind donations represent a CM strategy whereby the company promises to donate a second product for each one sold. In-kind donations are of particular interest to the present research. Unlike money, CM strategies centered on in-kind donations serve specific needs that may or may not match recipients' preferences.

Of course, one might assume that in-kind donations *always* match recipient preferences. Previous work finds that consumers perceive in-kind donations to be more "generous and caring" than cash

TABLE 1  
Means of Utilitarian and Hedonic Products in Experiment 2

Product	Hedonic rating	utilitarian rating	U-H score
Toothbrush	1.88 (1.33)	6.50 (0.98)	1.69 (1.03)
Water	2.24 (1.80)	6.60 (1.00)	1.82 (1.14)
Eyeglasses	2.31 (1.38)	6.21 (1.07)	2.05 (0.98)
Raincoat	2.41 (1.42)	6.28 (0.98)	2.07 (1.14)
Backpack	2.63 (1.51)	6.01 (1.16)	2.31 (1.24)
Blanket	2.85 (1.45)	6.03 (1.17)	2.41 (1.11)
Cappuccino Machine	5.62 (1.36)	3.26 (1.79)	5.18 (1.38)
Television	5.73 (1.23)	3.31 (1.62)	5.21 (1.14)
Vacation to Costa Rica	6.20 (1.13)	2.85 (1.67)	5.68 (1.18)
Wine	6.13 (1.11)	2.40 (1.45)	5.87 (1.08)
Spa Day	6.36 (1.02)	2.59 (1.51)	5.89 (0.99)
Concert Tickets	6.37 (1.13)	1.88 (1.34)	6.25 (1.13)

Note. U-H scores were calculated by reverse-keying utilitarian ratings and then taking the mean of hedonic and reverse-keyed utilitarian ratings. Standard deviations are reported in parentheses.

contributions because of the greater effort required to deliver them (Ellen, Mohr, & Webb, 2000, p. 398). Similarly, Gershon and Cryder (2018) find that product (vs. cash) donations are stronger signals of a company's communal intent and can enhance the favorability of companies that are not typically seen as communally oriented. Furthermore, Hildebrand, DeMotta, Sen, and Valenzuela (2017) demonstrated that consumers favor in-kind donations because they elicit stronger emotionality and thoughtfulness.

Despite being perceived as more generous, communal, and thoughtful, in-kind donations may not match recipients' preferences, especially given that many CM initiatives focus on charitable giving to strangers. That is, while research in the gift-giving literature shows that consumers consider the uniqueness of others' preferences and therefore select gifts that satisfy these idiosyncratic preferences (Steffel & Le Boeuf, 2014) and bring joy and pleasure to others (Lu, Liu, & Fang, 2016), these findings focus on recipients who are close friends or acquaintances. In contrast, in-kind donations focus on charitable giving to unknown individuals or entities. As such, the opportunity to provide an in-kind donation presents a dilemma for well-intentioned consumers. Indeed, research has indicated that individuals think more abstractly about socially distant recipients (Baskin, Wakslak, Trope, & Novemsky, 2014), which, in turn, can make the fulfillment of their tastes and desires a significant hurdle for those who desire to avoid the anxiety, stress, and ambivalence associated with providing a potentially unwanted product to unfamiliar others

(Belk, 2010). Additionally, the challenge of providing unfamiliar recipients with a product that matches their preferences is compounded when the context is novel (Wooten, 2000), as is often the case of one-for-one promotions. Consequently, we propose that the certainty of consumers' inferences about the preferences of strangers varies as a function of product type.

### How Product Type Clarifies (Obscures) Recipient Preferences

Products differ in the extent to which they are utilitarian or hedonic (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Hedonic products are largely defined in terms of pleasurable benefits, whereas utilitarian products are largely defined in terms of functional benefits (Batra & Ahtola, 1991; Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Lu et al., 2016; Savary, Goldsmith, & Dhar, 2015). Stated differently, hedonic products help consumers maximize pleasures (e.g., a candy bar, a health spa), whereas utilitarian products help consumers maximize practicalities (e.g., a toothbrush, a backpack). Of course, while most products fall into one type over the other, some can be positioned as either hedonic (e.g., coffee tastes good) or utilitarian (e.g., coffee energizes you) (see White, MacDonnell, & Dahl, 2011).

In this research, we propose that inferences regarding recipient preferences vary as a function of product type due to differences in beliefs regarding the homogeneity (vs. heterogeneity) in how others satisfy utilitarian and hedonic needs. Specifically, utilitarian products are often associated with necessity and essentials (Alba & Williams, 2013). Given the commonality of shared needs (e.g., Bazerman, Tenbrunsel, & Wade-Benzoni, 1998; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Maslow, 1943), consumers should believe that there is more uniformity in others' utilitarian preferences. As an extreme example, most people are similarly satisfied by drinking water. Conversely, hedonic products are often associated with pleasure and enjoyment (Kamakura & Yuxing Du, 2012). Given that individuals seek pleasure and enjoyment in unique ways (Kivetz & Simonson, 2002), consumers should believe in greater heterogeneity (i.e., less uniformity) with respect to others' hedonic preferences. Consistent with this possibility, research shows that consumers engage in more variety seeking with hedonic than utilitarian products (Inman, 2001; Ratner, Kahn, & Kahneman, 1999), are more likely to consider diverse choice sets when

hedonic motives are salient (Chowdhury, Ratneswar, & Desai, 2009), and are more likely to diverge from others in their preferences for products such as music and television programs than in toothpaste or dish soap (Berger & Heath, 2007).

Critical to the present research, the broad differences in preference composition should impact the efficacy of CM strategies like one-for-one promotions that seek to provide both utilitarian and hedonic in-kind products to individuals in need. Specifically, consumers should feel confident in donating utilitarian products due to a lay belief in homogeneity regarding recipient preferences for fulfilling functional needs. For instance, consumers who purchase a pen or a toothbrush can easily imagine how the provision of an identical pen or toothbrush to someone in need would satisfy their preference (Bekkers & Weipking, 2011). Indeed, the perceived similarity in needs has been shown to increase the likelihood of sharing (Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005), and givers are more confident when they believe they can match the preferences of the recipient (Givi & Galak, 2017). In fact, givers often choose utilitarian products for recipients when they are uncertain of the recipient's preferences (Otnes, Lowrey, & Kim, 1993). They believe the practicality of the product will be appreciated (Givi & Galak, 2017). Consequently, we predict that one-for-one promotions should *increase* purchase intentions when coupled with utilitarian products, as consumers believe that people satisfy their utilitarian needs in similar ways.

Conversely, consumers should feel uncertain about the donation of hedonic products due to a lay belief in the heterogeneity regarding recipient preferences for fulfilling pleasures. Indeed, this lay belief in preference heterogeneity for hedonic products should prompt avoidance due to uncertainty about whether an unknown recipient would prefer the same kind of hedonic product. This possibility is consistent with research that supports a lay belief that recipients' preferences for hedonic products are varied and wide-ranging (Alba & Williams, 2013; He & Bond, 2013; Kivetz & Simonson, 2002). Moreover, as noted, consumers are motivated to meet recipients' unique preferences (Steffel & Le Boeuf, 2014; see Belk, 1996). Indeed, research indicates that hedonic search motives are abandoned when individuals are concerned about making poor choices for others (Chowdhury et al., 2009). Consequently, we predict that one-for-one promotions should *decrease* purchase intentions when coupled with hedonic products, as consumers believe that people satisfy their hedonic pleasures in different ways.

## Overview

Five experiments provide support for the importance of recipient preferences in CM by demonstrating that: (a) one-for-one promotions enhance choice for a utilitarian product but reduce choice for a hedonic product within a field study (Experiment 1) and across an array of products and services that naturally vary in level of utilitarian versus hedonic attributes (Experiment 2), (b) this effect stems from the differences in uncertainty regarding the charitable giving of utilitarian and hedonic products (Experiment 3), (c) these findings are rooted in lay beliefs regarding the homogeneity in fulfilling others' utilitarian and hedonic preferences (Experiment 4), and (d) these findings represent an altruistic intention to help others (rather than a selfish act to help oneself) (Experiment 5).

Importantly, these findings occurred across different samples, for products either pretested or manipulated to vary in the extent to which they are hedonic/utilitarian, and even controlling for potential alternative explanations (e.g., perceived product quality, promotion usefulness, recipient deservedness). Collectively, this research offers unique insight into the basis by which one-for-one promotions are effective, the role of donation uncertainty in shaping this basis, the influence of product type in shaping the beliefs about recipient preferences, and the importance of recipient preferences in understanding the nuances of CM strategies that rely on prosocial benefits.

All experiments received approval from an institutional review board, target samples were based on a priori power analyses (power of .8, small-medium effect sizes, an alpha level of .05; Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007), and experiments included appropriate attention checks (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009). All measures are described in the manuscript, and additional information is provided in the supplemental MDA (Appendix S2).

## Experiment 1

As an initial test of our hypothesis, we conducted a randomized field study. In this study, confederates seated at a booth in a large public space offered respondents a product in return for completing an unrelated survey. Depending on the day, respondents could choose between either one of two utilitarian products (pens) or one of two hedonic products (candy bars). Critically, when presented

with the choice between the two options, one option was associated with a one-for-one promotion, whereas the other option was not. Consistent with our hypotheses, we expected that the one-for-one promotion would increase preference for utilitarian products but decrease preference for hedonic products.

### Method

#### Participants and design

One hundred forty undergraduates were targeted to complete a field survey on course options at their university. Due to time constraints, we were able to recruit 116 undergraduates (45.7% Female,  $M_{\text{age}} = 20.34$ ). Participants were randomly assigned to choose between either two utilitarian products (*utilitarian* condition) or two hedonic products (*hedonic* condition). Importantly, one of the options in each set was associated with a one-for-one promotion.

#### Procedure

One of the experimenters set up a booth in a public space where undergraduates were openly invited to complete a survey about current course curricula at their university. In exchange for their participation, students were offered a choice between two products. We manipulated the type of products in the choice set. Specifically, we randomly assigned whether the available product was a choice between one of two *Gelio* pens (blue or black; *utilitarian* condition) or one of two *Esther Price* candy bars (original or crunch flavored; *hedonic* condition). Moreover, we counterbalanced the days in which participants were choosing between pens and choosing between candy bars. Thus, we were able to hold both brand and price among options constant.

Within each choice set (utilitarian or hedonic), one product was associated with a *one-for-one* promotion and the other was not. Specifically, participants were provided instructions on a piece of paper at the end of the survey about the two options. On the paper, participants were informed that selecting the one-for-one option meant not only that they would receive their choice but also that their choice would be donated to someone in need.

Of importance, the promotion manipulation (i.e., which of the two pens/candy bars was associated with the one-for-one promotion) was counterbalanced across options within choice sets.

Additionally, donation beneficiaries were intentionally unidentified—as were the reasons for the promotion—to control for individual differences in concern for specific groups (Ellen et al., 2000). Finally, to limit socially desirable responding, instructions pertaining to the one-for-one promotion were only provided on the piece of paper at the end of the survey (i.e., not verbally), and participants indicated their choice of product (and subsequently received that product) from a separate research assistant blind to the conditions and seated at a separate table in a different area from the survey administration.

### Results

#### Preliminary analyses

Fifty-two participants completed the survey on those days in which the pen was offered as an inducement for completing the survey, with 28 participants favoring the blue pen and 24 participants favoring the black pen. Separately, 64 participants completed the survey on those days that the candy bar was offered as an inducement, with 34 participants favoring the original flavor and 30 participants favoring the crunch flavor. Analysis of these choices revealed that participants did not differentially prefer a pen color ( $\chi^2 = 0.308$ ,  $p = .579$ ) or a candy bar flavor ( $\chi^2 = 0.250$ ,  $p = .617$ ).

#### Main analysis

We submitted participants' choices to a chi-square test of proportions. The results revealed an effect of product type on choice ( $\chi^2(1) = 5.99$ ,  $p = .014$ ; see Figure 1). Specifically, participants in the *utilitarian* condition were more likely to choose the option with the one-for-one promotion (63.5%) than were those in the *hedonic* condition (40.6%). Viewed differently, participants in the *hedonic* condition were more likely to choose the product without an accompanying promotional offer (59.4%) than were those in the *utilitarian* condition (36.5%).

### Discussion

The findings of Experiment 1 revealed that consumers were more likely to choose the utilitarian option (i.e., pen) paired with the one-for-one promotion but *less* likely to choose the hedonic option (i.e., candy bar) paired with the one-for-one promotion. Importantly, this effect held despite

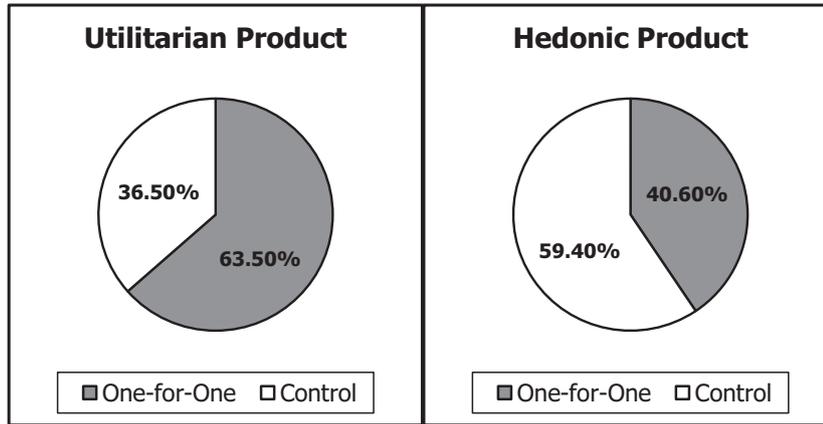


FIGURE 1. Choice frequencies as a function of product type and promotion in Experiment 1.

idiosyncratic preferences (e.g., pen color or candy bar flavor) and attempts to minimize social desirability concerns (e.g., consumers not wanting to publicly admit they do not want to support someone in need). Moreover, these findings occurred for an actual consumption choice in an ecologically valid choice setting.

## Experiment 2

To complement the findings of Experiment 1, we conducted a second experiment to examine the generalizability of the documented effect across an array of products. That is, while the effects of the initial study are strong, inherent differences in the products apart from the extent to which they are hedonic or utilitarian could have resulted in the differential effects. Thus, we tested the efficacy of the one-for-one promotion across 12 products pretested to naturally vary in their levels of utilitarian versus hedonic attributes. Moreover, to isolate the role of the one-for-one promotion, individuals made a single (rather than comparative) evaluation.

### Pretest

To generate a continuum of products that vary in levels of utilitarian versus hedonic attributes, we conducted a pretest ( $N = 101$ ) that presented participants with utilitarian and hedonic definitions. Afterward, we asked them to rate 12 products (e.g., toothbrush, eyeglasses, blanket, concert tickets: see Table 1 for list of products) on a 7-point semantic differential measure anchored from 1 = *Not at all hedonic/utilitarian* to 7 = *Extremely hedonic/utilitarian*. Note that the order in which products were

presented to participants was randomized to control for any order or presentation effects. The utilitarian measure was reverse-scored, and the two measures were mean-averaged to reflect overall hedonic product rating (i.e., “utilitarian-hedonic score”; U-H score). Descriptive statistics by-product are presented in Table 1. We used U-H scores as our primary predictor variable in the main experiment.

### Method

#### Participants and design

Six hundred ninety-six online recruits (57.2% Male,  $M_{\text{age}} = 31.95$ ) were randomly assigned to one of 24 conditions in a 2 (promotion: one-for-one or control)  $\times$  12 (product: utilitarian to hedonic) between-subjects design. Importantly, the U-H scores determined by pretesting served as our primary predictor variable.

#### Procedure

Upon being welcomed to the study, participants were informed of our interest in their response to everyday consumer decisions and were subsequently asked to evaluate one of the 12 pretested products. Those in the *one-for-one* condition were told that, for every product selected, the same product would be donated to someone in need. Those in the *control* (no promotion) condition were not given this information. Afterward, participants provided their purchase intentions toward the respective product on a 9-point scale anchored *Not willing at all*—*Very willing*. Finally, participants responded to a series of demographic questions before being debriefed, thanked, and compensated.

### Results

To model the interactive effects of promotion and product type conditions on purchase intentions, we constructed a multilevel model to explicitly test U-H scores (determined by the pretest) and to account for unobserved product heterogeneity.

Using R (R Development Core Team, 2012) and lme4 (Bates, Maechler, Bolker, & Walker, 2015), we performed a linear mixed effects analysis of the relationship between U-H scores, dummy coded promotion conditions (1 = one-for-one, 0 = control), and purchase intentions. We included fixed effects for U-H scores, promotion conditions, and their interactions. As random effects, we included an intercept for product as well as a random slope for U-H scores, promotion conditions, and their interactions by-product. This allowed us to model not only natural differences in purchase intentions that might exist between products but also the potential for differential effects in our focal interaction by-product.

Results yielded an overall significant promotion  $\times$  U-H score interaction ( $b = -0.50$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $t = -5.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ; see Figure 2). Spotlight analyses revealed that when utilitarian ratings were higher ( $-1$  SD U-H score), the one-for-one promotion significantly increased purchase intentions relative to no promotion ( $b = 1.31$ ,  $SE = .25$ ,  $t = 5.21$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Conversely, when hedonic ratings were higher ( $+1$  SD U-H score), the one-for-one promotion significantly reduced purchase intentions relative to no promotion ( $b = -0.55$ ,  $SE = .23$ ,  $t = -2.33$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

### Post-test

It should be noted that one-for-one promotions may be perceived as more typical or appropriate when paired with a utilitarian (vs. hedonic) product. If so, then product type in this context would vary not only in the hedonic/utilitarian nature of the product but also in the perceived fit of the product as a donation. To shed light on this possibility, we conducted a post-test ( $N = 607$ ) whereby participants indicated the typicality and appropriateness of a company donating each of the 12 total products used in Experiment 2 to someone in need as a promotion. Participants were randomly assigned to rate only one product, and ratings were obtained on six, 7-point semantic differentials to assess typicality (*Atypical—Typical*, *Unusual—Usual*, *Unexpected—Expected*:  $\alpha = .955$ ) and appropriateness (*Inappropriate—Appropriate*, *Unsuitable—Suitable*, *Improper—Proper*:  $\alpha = .952$ ). This method allowed us to create a typical rating and appropriateness rating for each product.

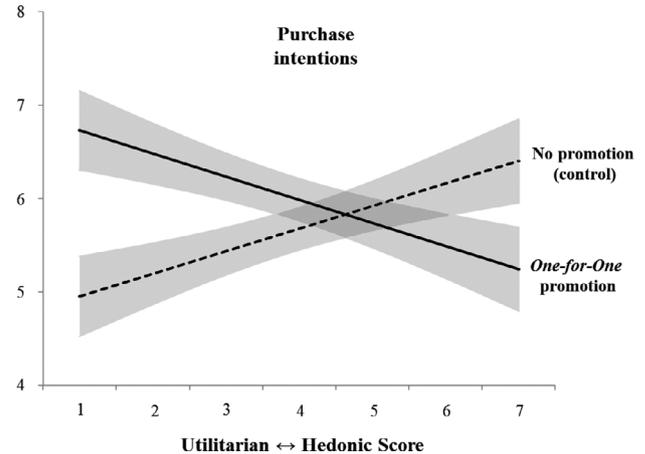


FIGURE 2. Purchase intentions in Experiment 2. Notes: This figure is based on a linear mixed effects model that predicts purchase behavior based on the study conducted in Experiment 2. Shaded area represents 95% confidence intervals.

Regression analyses revealed that utilitarian products were rated as more typical ( $b = -0.30$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $t = -7.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and more appropriate ( $b = -0.28$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $t = -8.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than were hedonic products. Yet, when we included the typicality and appropriateness product ratings as covariates in the model tested in Experiment 2, the promotion  $\times$  U-H score interaction remained significant ( $b = -0.37$ ,  $SE = .089$ ,  $t = -4.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, because typicality of the promotion did vary as a function of product type, we hold the focal product constant in subsequent experiments (3-5).

### Discussion

These findings expand upon the ecological validity of Experiment 1 by demonstrating that the one-for-one promotion's efficacy is critically dependent upon the utilitarian versus hedonic nature of a product. Indeed, across a continuum of 12 products pretested to vary as a function of product type, the one-for-one promotion increased preferences for utilitarian products but decreased preferences for hedonic products. Furthermore, this effect held when accounting for other product attributes, when product type is exogenous (i.e., U-H scores extracted from a pretest), when the promotion is evaluated in singular (as well as comparative: Experiment 1) contexts, and when controlling for the typicality and appropriateness of the firm donating the product as a promotion. Collectively, then, one-for-one promotions heighten the appeal of utilitarian products but undermine the appeal of hedonic products.

### Experiment 3

The first two experiments demonstrated the critical role of product type in determining the efficacy of one-for-one promotions. We propose this effect of product type on the efficacy of one-for-one promotions occurs because consumers hold differing lay beliefs regarding recipients' utilitarian and hedonic preferences. These differing lay beliefs, in turn, impact consumers' certainty in their response.

Specifically, because consumers believe recipients' preference for utilitarian products is largely homogeneous, we propose that one-for-one promotions increase purchase intentions by increasing response certainty, as in-kind donations are perceived to be more likely to fulfill recipients' preferences and thus more appropriate for utilitarian products (relative to a no promotion control). Conversely, because consumers believe recipients' preference for hedonic products is largely heterogeneous, we propose that one-for-one promotions decrease purchase intentions by decreasing response certainty, as in-kind donations are perceived to be less likely to fulfill recipients' preferences and thus less appropriate for hedonic products (relative to a no promotion control). Experiment 3 directly tested this hypothesis by measuring individuals' certainty regarding the appropriateness of the charitable donation.

Additionally, one could argue that the effect of associating a one-for-one promotion with utilitarian and hedonic products is due to different perceptions of the decision context. As noted in Experiment 2, utilitarian products are seen as more typical of a one-for-one promotion than are hedonic products. Similarly, associating utilitarian and hedonic products with a one-for-one promotion may alter perceptions of product quality, recipients' deservingness of the free product, company wastefulness, product usefulness as a donation, and the typicality of this type of marketing tactic. To address these possible alternative explanations, we not only held the product constant to isolate the impact of product type but included measures of each construct to assess their potential role in explaining the effect of product type on the efficacy of one-for-one promotions.

#### Method

##### Participants and design

Two hundred twenty respondents were recruited online for a study on consumer perception. Thirteen

participants were removed for failing our attention checks, which resulted in a final sample of 207 participants (51% Female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.55$ ). Participants were randomly assigned in a 2 (product type: hedonic or utilitarian)  $\times$  2 (promotion: one-for-one or control) between-subjects design.

##### Procedure

Participants were welcomed to the study where they were asked to offer their evaluation of a fictitious coffee company called *Concord Stoker Coffee*. They were subsequently presented with information from the company's website. This information served as our manipulation of product type by altering whether coffee was positioned as primarily utilitarian or hedonic. We used coffee as our target product due to prior research demonstrating that consumers can perceive specific products (i.e., coffee) as either utilitarian or hedonic based on salient information (see White et al., 2011). To test the veracity of our manipulation, a separate sample of participants ( $N = 46$ ) evaluated the information used to manipulate utilitarian versus hedonic perceptions of Concord Stoker Coffee on a 9-point scale (1 = *very utilitarian*, 9 = *very hedonic*). Both descriptions were found to be significantly different from each other ( $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 5.30$ ;  $M_{\text{hedonic}} = 6.85$ ;  $t(45) = -3.23, p < .01$ ).

In the *utilitarian* condition, participants were informed of the functional benefits of coffee (e.g., boosts energy, alertness, and metabolism, contains valuable probiotics, and is high in antioxidants) before reading four consumer reviews that emphasized the functional features of coffee (e.g., "Nothing is better for productivity."). In the *hedonic* condition, participants were informed of the aesthetic benefits of coffee (e.g., increased mood and well-being, enhanced appreciation for complex flavors, joy of drinking a favorite flavor) before reading four consumer reviews that emphasized the aesthetic nature of coffee (e.g., "When I want to treat myself, this is the coffee that I drink.>").

After reading the information about Concord Stoker Coffee, participants were randomly assigned to receive one-for-one promotional information or not. Participants in the *control* condition received no additional information, whereas those in the *one-for-one promotion* condition were informed the company was currently running a special whereby, with the purchase of any pound of coffee, the company would donate a pound of that same coffee to a family in need. Participants indicated their purchase

intentions for a pound of coffee from *Concord Stoker Coffee* on a 9-point scale anchored *Not willing at all*—*Very willing*.

Participants then indicated their certainty in their response to the purchase intention item in the present context. Importantly, this measure had to be general to allow for comparison across conditions whether participants received the one-for-one promotion offer or not. As such, participants were asked to reflect back on their willingness to purchase the pound of coffee and to indicate their agreement with the following three statements: "The appropriate response is unclear to me," "I am unsure how to respond in this situation," and "I am uncertain how most people would respond in this situation." Responses were obtained on 9-point scales anchored at *Strongly Disagree*—*Strongly Agree* and averaged to create a composite index ( $\alpha = .944$ ). Higher values indicated greater response uncertainty.

Additionally, participants responded to measures of the perceived quality of the coffee as well as recipients' deservingness of the free product, company wastefulness, product usefulness as a donation, and the typicality of this type of promotion as a function of product type. Specifically, participants indicated the quality of the coffee made by this company as well as how deserving others are of receiving coffee from this company, how wasteful it would be for the company to donate their coffee, how useful it would be for others to receive coffee from this company, and how typical it would be for this company to donate coffee as a promotion on corresponding 9-point scales anchored at *Very low quality*—*Very high quality*, *Not at all deserving*—*Very deserving*, *Not at all wasteful*—*Very wasteful*, *Not useful at all*—*Very useful*, and *Not typical at all*—*Very typical*.

Finally, participants responded to a series of demographic questions and attention checks before being debriefed, thanked, and compensated.

### Results

All measures were submitted to an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), with product type (0 = utilitarian, 1 = hedonic) and promotion (0 = control, 1 = one-for-one) as independent variables. Means are listed in Table 2.

#### Purchase intentions

Analysis of the purchase intention data revealed a significant effect of product type ( $F(1, 203) = 6.45$ ,  $p = .012$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .031$ ) that was qualified by a significant

product type  $\times$  promotion interaction ( $F(1, 203) = 11.91$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .055$ ). When positioned as utilitarian, participants were more willing to purchase the product coupled with the one-for-one promotion (vs. the control) ( $F(1, 203) = 5.55$ ,  $p = .019$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .027$ ). Conversely, when positioned as hedonic, participants were less willing to purchase the product coupled with the one-for-one promotion (vs. the control) ( $F(1, 203) = 6.38$ ,  $p = .012$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .030$ ).

#### Response certainty

Analysis of the certainty data also revealed a significant effect of product type ( $F(1, 203) = 5.71$ ,  $p = .018$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .027$ ) that was qualified by a significant product type  $\times$  promotion interaction ( $F(1, 220) = 8.26$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .039$ ). When the product was positioned as utilitarian, participants reported greater certainty when the product was coupled with the one-for-one promotion (vs. the control) ( $F(1, 203) = 4.31$ ,  $p = .039$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .021$ ). Conversely, when the product was positioned as hedonic, participants reported greater uncertainty when the product was coupled with the one-for-one promotion (vs. the control) ( $F(1, 203) = 3.95$ ,  $p = .048$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .019$ ).

#### Alternative analyses

Analysis of the alternative measures failed to reveal any significant effects of product type ( $ps > .20$ ), promotion ( $ps > .17$ ), or product type  $\times$  promotion interaction ( $ps > .14$ ). Specifically, neither the main effects nor the interaction was observed for the measures of quality ( $ps > .16$ ), deservingness ( $ps > .39$ ), wastefulness ( $ps > .15$ ), usefulness

TABLE 2  
Means of Dependent Measures as a Function of Product Type and Promotion in Experiment 3

Measures	Utilitarian		Hedonic	
	One-for-One	Control	One-for-One	Control
Purchase Intentions	7.17 (1.56)	6.20 (2.12)	5.42 (2.37)	6.46 (2.28)
Response Uncertainty	2.98 (2.07)	3.99 (2.54)	4.78 (2.52)	3.82 (2.65)
Perceived Quality	6.87 (1.57)	6.49 (1.77)	6.67 (1.51)	6.46 (1.33)
Deservingness	6.54 (1.94)	6.94 (1.86)	6.80 (1.84)	6.83 (1.71)
Wastefulness	6.65 (2.18)	6.29 (2.43)	6.10 (2.49)	6.70 (2.55)
Usefulness	5.98 (1.98)	6.65 (2.15)	6.26 (2.35)	6.30 (2.35)
Typicality	5.50 (2.40)	6.04 (2.31)	6.32 (1.74)	5.98 (2.06)

( $ps > .25$ ), or typicality ( $ps > .14$ ). Moreover, including these factors as covariates had nominal impact on the interactive effect of the manipulations on purchase intention ( $F(1, 198) = 14.74, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .089$ ) or response certainty ( $F(1, 198) = 6.88, p = .009, \eta_p^2 = .034$ ).

#### *Mediation analysis*

As a direct test of our conceptual model, we constructed a 95% CI around the interactive effect of product type and promotion on purchase intentions through response certainty (Model 4; Hayes, 2017). The analysis revealed a significant mediation pathway (indirect effect =  $-0.283$ , 95% CI:  $-0.586, -0.068$ ). Moreover, this mediation pathway remained significant when controlling for the alternative measures related to quality, deservingness, wastefulness, usefulness, and typicality (indirect effect =  $-0.260$ , 95% CI:  $-0.563, -0.043$ ).

#### *Discussion*

The findings from Experiment 3 provide essential insight into the mechanism through which the efficacy of one-for-one promotions varies across utilitarian and hedonic products. Specifically, when the product was positioned as utilitarian, the one-for-one promotion increased purchase intentions due to increased certainty that the response was appropriate. However, when the product was positioned as hedonic, the one-for-one promotion decreased purchase intentions due to decreased certainty that the response was appropriate. Additionally, this effect of perceived appropriateness of the response was independent of potential alternative explanations concerning differences in product quality, recipients' deservingness of the free product, company wastefulness, product usefulness as a donation, and the typicality of this promotional tactic. Furthermore, as in Experiment 2, the findings were unrelated to idiosyncrasies with the particular product, though here these idiosyncrasies were controlled for by positioning the same product as utilitarian or hedonic (White et al., 2011). Consequently, the efficacy of one-for-one promotions across product type is intricately linked to the perceived appropriateness of charitable giving for utilitarian and hedonic products.

#### **Experiment 4**

The purpose of Experiment 4 was to test a critical assumption of our model directly. Specifically, we

propose that the difference in certainty of donating utilitarian and hedonic products stems from a lay belief that fulfilling others' utilitarian preferences is more homogenous than is fulfilling others' hedonic preferences. If true, then manipulating the homogeneity of people's preferences should alter the efficacy of one-for-one promotions, irrespective of product type. That is, if people have highly similar (i.e., homogenous) preferences in a product category (e.g., consumers all like the same coffee), then consumers should be more willing to engage in one-for-one promotions due to greater certainty that the donation will meet others' preferences. However, if people have highly dissimilar (i.e., heterogeneous) preferences in a product category (e.g., consumers all like different types of coffee), then consumers should be less willing to engage in one-for-one promotions due to greater uncertainty that the donation will meet others' preferences.

To offer initial support for the lay belief that utilitarian needs are fulfilled in similar ways but hedonic pleasures are filled in different ways, we conducted a pilot study. Specifically, 103 participants were randomly assigned to indicate their level of agreement with one of two statements: "People's fundamental needs are met mostly in the same way" or "People find pleasure in life in mostly the same way." Agreement was indicated on a binary scale anchored *Yes* or *No*. Chi-square analyses revealed that people were significantly likely to agree that needs are met in mostly the same way (80.76% agreement vs. 19.24% disagreement:  $\chi^2(1, N = 52) = 19.69, p < .001$ ) but were significantly likely to disagree that pleasures are met in mostly the same way (27.45% agreement vs. 72.55% disagreement:  $\chi^2(1, N = 51) = 10.37, p = .001$ ). These preliminary findings support the lay belief that fulfilling utilitarian preferences is more homogenous than is fulfilling hedonic preferences.

Importantly, we tested this hypothesis by giving consumers a real choice between two raffles: one where they would choose a free product and one where they would choose a free product and the same chosen product would be donated to someone in need. As in the prior experiments, we expected consumers to be more likely to choose the raffle associated with the one-for-one promotion when the product was positioned as utilitarian rather than hedonic. Furthermore, we expected consumers to be more likely to choose the raffle associated with the one-for-one promotion when product preferences are similar but less likely to choose the raffle associated with the one-for-one promotion when

product preferences are dissimilar, regardless of product type.

### Method

#### Participants and design

Three hundred twenty respondents were recruited online for a study on product feedback. Eight participants were removed for failing our attention checks, which resulted in a final sample of 312 participants (51% Male;  $M_{\text{age}} = 37.21$ ). Participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (product type: utilitarian or hedonic)  $\times$  3 (preference similarity: control, similar, or dissimilar) between-subjects design.

#### Procedure

Participants were welcomed to the study and informed they would be asked for their feedback on a digital bookstore called *eBooks.com*. They were subsequently presented with information about consumers' general preferences toward books (digital or otherwise). This information served as our manipulation of preference similarity. In the *similar preference* condition, participants were told that a recent analysis by *Nielsen Ratings* revealed that the majority of people like the same books, that this pattern of similarity is one reason authors are ostensibly 87% more likely to make the *NY Times Best Seller List* for their second (vs. first) book, and that this similarity is especially true for e-books as book preferences are highly consistent and less wide-ranging than they think. In the *dissimilar preference* condition, participants were told that a recent analysis by *Nielsen Ratings* revealed that the majority of people like different books, this pattern of dissimilarity is one reason authors are ostensibly 87% more likely to make the *NY Times Best Seller List* for their first (vs. second) book, and that this dissimilarity is especially true for e-books as book preferences are highly varied and more wide-ranging than they think. In the *control* condition, participants were not provided with any information about consumers' general preferences.

Following this information, participants were presented with information about *eBooks.com* that varied in a way that served as our manipulation of product type by allowing us to alter whether eBooks was positioned as primarily utilitarian or hedonic. In the *utilitarian* condition, participants were provided with a logo and slogan that emphasized functionality (i.e., "Reading has never been so

accessible.") before reading five consumer reviews that emphasized the functional nature of eBooks (e.g., "finally an efficient way to access a digital library of books."). In the *hedonic* condition, participants were provided with a logo and slogan that emphasized pleasure (i.e., "Reading has never been so fun!") before reading five consumer reviews that emphasized the pleasurable nature of eBooks (e.g., "finally a simple way to indulge in guilty pleasures."). Of note, we pretested the efficacy of this manipulation by having participants ( $N = 54$ ) evaluate the information used to manipulate utilitarian vs. hedonic perceptions of eBooks.com on a 9-point scale (1 = *very utilitarian*, 9 = *very hedonic*). The findings revealed the manipulations to be significantly different from each other ( $M_{\text{utilitarian}} = 5.04$ ;  $M_{\text{hedonic}} = 6.54$ ;  $t(52) = -2.60$ ,  $p = .012$ ).

After responding to a series of questions about the company to be consistent with our cover story, participants were thanked for their feedback and informed that, as an extra thank you for their participation, they would be entered into one of two raffles. In both raffles, participants were told they would be entered into a raffle to win a free digital book from eBooks. However, in the one-for-one promotion raffle, participants were further told that eBooks.com would donate the same digital book you select to someone in need. The two choices were presented side-by-side, with the order counterbalanced.

To ensure participants viewed their chances of winning either raffle as equally likely, we conducted two pretests. In the first pretest ( $N = 97$ ), participants indicated the likelihood of winning either the raffle associated with the one-for-one promotion or the raffle not associated with the one-for-one promotion on a 9-point scale (1 = *not at all likely*, 9 = *very likely*). An independent samples t-test revealed that participants viewed winning the raffle associated with the one-for-one promotion ( $M = 6.15$ ,  $SD = 2.06$ ) as equally likely as winning the raffle not associated with the one-for-one promotion ( $M = 6.02$ ,  $SD = 2.29$ ;  $t(95) < 1$ ). Given the comparative nature of the choice, however, we conducted a second pretest ( $N = 61$ ) whereby participants were presented with both raffle options and asked to indicate the likelihood they would win each raffle on slider scales anchored from 0% to 100%. A paired-samples t-test revealed that participants viewed winning the raffle associated with the one-for-one promotion (58.51%) as equally likely as winning the raffle not associated with the one-for-one promotion (57.39%;  $t(60) = 1.046$ ,  $p = .300$ ).

Upon indicating their choice of raffle, participants in the main study responded to a series of demographic questions and attention checks before being debriefed, thanked, and compensated.

### Results

Participants' raffle choice (0 = one-for-one absent, 1 = one-for-one present) was submitted to a binary logistic regression, with product type (0 = utilitarian, 1 = hedonic) and preference similarity (0 = control, 1 = similar, 2 = dissimilar) as independent variables. The analysis revealed a significant product type  $\times$  preference similarity interaction ( $b = 0.821$ , Wald's  $\chi^2 = 4.72$ ,  $p = .030$ ; see Figure 3).

For those in the *utilitarian* condition, participants in the dissimilar preference condition (72.55%) were less likely to choose the one-for-one raffle than either the similar preference condition (89.08%:  $b = -0.965$ , Wald's  $\chi^2 = 3.946$ ,  $p = .047$ ) or the control condition (90.57%:  $b = -0.563$ , Wald's  $\chi^2 = 4.706$ ,  $p = .030$ ), which did not differ from each other ( $b = -0.232$ , Wald's  $\chi^2 = 0.174$ ,  $p = .793$ ). Conversely, for those in the *hedonic* condition, participants in the similar preference condition (86.28%) were more likely to choose the one-for-one raffle than either the dissimilar preference condition (75.47%:  $b = -0.703$ , Wald's  $\chi^2 = 2.306$ ,  $p = .129$ ) or the control condition (71.43%:  $b = 1.114$ , Wald's  $\chi^2 = 6.634$ ,  $p = .010$ ), which did not differ from each other ( $b = 0.109$ , Wald's  $\chi^2 = 0.321$ ,  $p = .571$ ).

Viewed differently, the control condition revealed a significant effect of product type in the

same pattern as demonstrated in the prior three experiments; those in the *utilitarian* condition were significantly more likely to choose the one-for-one raffle than were those in the hedonic condition ( $b = -1.345$ , Wald's  $\chi^2 = 5.642$ ,  $p = .018$ ). However, there was no difference in raffle choice as a function of product type in either the *similar preference* ( $b = -0.262$ , Wald's  $\chi^2 = 0.194$ ,  $p = .659$ ) or *dissimilar preference* ( $b = 0.152$ , Wald's  $\chi^2 = 0.115$ ,  $p = .734$ ) conditions.

### Discussion

The results of Experiment 4 provide further support for the impact of product type on the efficacy of one-for-one promotions while offering critical insight into the role of consumers' inferences regarding recipient preferences. Consistent with the prior three experiments, the one-for-one promotion was more effective for utilitarian than hedonic products. However, this effect of product type was superseded by preference similarity. Specifically, the one-for-one promotion was more effective when participants believed consumers' preferences toward the target product to be highly homogeneous. Conversely, the one-for-one promotion was less effective when participants believed consumers' preferences toward the target product to be highly heterogeneous. This finding is consistent with the assumption that consumer certainty in the appropriateness of charitable giving is intricately linked to recipients' preference homogeneity and speaks directly to the role of consumers' inferences regarding recipient preferences in explaining why one-for-one promotions are effective for utilitarian products but backfire for hedonic products.

### Experiment 5

The findings thus far demonstrate that the efficacy of one-for-one promotions varies as a function of product type due to differing lay beliefs regarding recipients' utilitarian and hedonic preferences. One consequence of this effect is that one-for-one promotions backfire for hedonic products. We propose (and show) this backfire effect is due to uncertainty in matching recipients' hedonic preferences. Yet an alternative explanation for the negative effect of associating a one-for-one promotion with hedonic products is that consumers are selfish. Research, for instance, demonstrates that consumers act selfishly when in competitive contexts (Roux, Goldsmith, & Bonezzi, 2015), and one could reason the presence

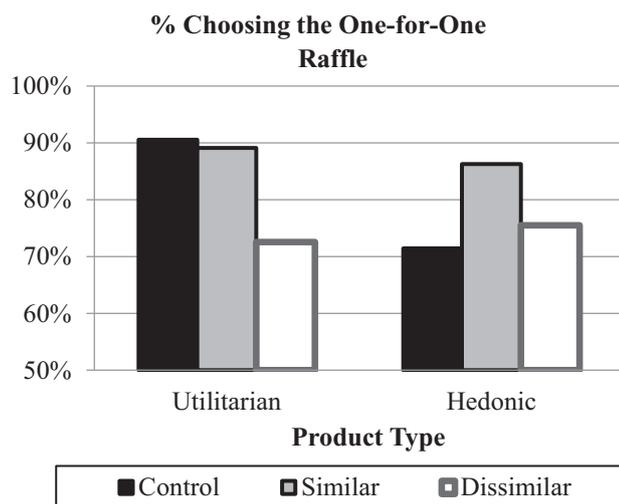


FIGURE 3. Percentage of participants selecting the one-for-one raffle as a function of product type and preference similarity in Study 4.

of a one-for-one option could cue competition in consumers. Indeed, donating an identical product to an individual in need may trigger consumers to be reluctant to share their consumption experience with others (e.g., Crocker, Canevello, & Brown, 2017; Givi & Galak, 2020), particularly when the consumption experience represents an idiosyncratic, hedonic want. Moreover, this threat would be particularly salient when the individual in need is perceived as familiar to the consumer, as research has indicated that selfish and self-focused motives are heightened when making comparisons with familiar others (Bryksina, 2020; Givi & Galak, 2020). As such, the backfiring effect of one-for-one promotions associated with hedonic products might be due to consumers' hesitance to share their hedonic experiences with (potentially) familiar others.

We tested this possibility in Experiment 5 by varying the familiarity of the donation recipient. If consumers are motivated by selfishness, we would expect the one-for-one promotion to backfire for the high familiarity recipient, as heightened familiarity presents a more significant threat to the self. Conversely, if consumers are motivated to avoid uncertain preferences, we would expect the one-for-one promotion to backfire for the low familiarity recipient. Low familiarity presents greater preference uncertainty. To offer additional insight, we also included measures of both response uncertainty (see Experiment 3) and selfishness.

### Method

#### Participants and design

One hundred eighty undergraduates were recruited for a study on consumer perception. Four participants were removed for failing our attention checks, which resulted in a final sample of 176 participants (50% Female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 20.62$ ). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three hedonic conditions: a one-for-one high familiarity target condition, a one-for-one low familiarity target condition, and a no promotion control condition. This experiment was pre-registered at: <https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=xp2nw7>.

#### Procedure

Participants were welcomed to the study where they were asked to offer their evaluation of a fictitious coffee company, Concord Stoker Coffee, described in Experiment 3. Here, however, participants were presented with information from the

company's website that positioned the coffee as primarily hedonic.

After reading the information about Concord Stoker Coffee, participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. Participants in the *one-for-one high familiarity target* condition were informed the company was currently running a special: with the purchase of any pound of coffee, the company would donate a pound of that same coffee to a needy individual in the city of the participants' university. Participants in the *one-for-one low familiarity target* condition were informed the company was currently running a special: with the purchase of any pound of coffee, the company would donate a pound of that same coffee to a needy individual in Santiago, Chile. Participants in the *no promotion control* condition received no additional information. Participants indicated their purchase intentions for a pound of coffee from *Concord Stoker Coffee* on a 9-point scale anchored *Not willing at all*—*Very willing*.

Participants then indicated their certainty in their response to the purchase intention item in the present context on the same three items used in Experiment 3 ( $\alpha = .913$ ). They also completed an eight-item measure of state selfishness. Participants were asked to respond to each item based on their current state, and sample items included the following: "I hate seeing someone I know wearing the same article of clothing that I have" and "I like to be the only person I know to have a particular product." Responses were obtained on 9-point scales anchored at *Strongly Disagree*—*Strongly Agree* and averaged to create a composite index ( $\alpha = .902$ ), such that higher values indicated greater state selfishness.

Finally, participants responded to a series of demographic questions and attention checks and the manipulation checks—before being debriefed and thanked.

### Results

All measures were submitted to a One-Way ANOVA, with promotion (0 = control, 1 = one-for-one high familiarity target, 2 = one-for-one low familiarity target) as independent variables. Means are listed in Table 3.

#### Manipulation checks

We had participants assess the target product's hedonic positioning on a 9-point scale anchored at *Not indulgent at all*—*Very indulgent*. Responses

revealed that the overall mean ( $M = 6.37$ ,  $SD = 2.05$ ) was significantly greater than the scalar midpoint ( $t(175) = 8.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ). We also asked participants in the one-for-one conditions to report the likelihood they would know or possibly run into the promotion's target on a 9-point scale anchored at *Not likely at all—Very likely*. An independent samples  $t$ -test revealed that those in the high familiarity condition ( $M = 5.81$ ,  $SD = 2.28$ ) reported being significantly more likely to know or run into the target than are those in the low familiarity condition ( $M = 4.75$ ,  $SD = 2.52$ ) ( $t(114) = 5.64$ ,  $p = .019$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .047$ ).

#### Purchase intentions

Analysis of the purchase intention data revealed a significant effect of promotion ( $F(2, 173) = 4.40$ ,  $p = .014$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .048$ ). Orthogonal contrasts revealed that those exposed to the one-for-one promotion with a low familiarity target were significantly less willing to purchase the hedonic product than were those exposed to either the no promotion control or the one-for-one promotion with a high familiarity target ( $F(1, 173) = 8.72$ ,  $p = .004$ ), which did not differ from each other ( $F < 1$ ).

#### Response uncertainty

Analysis of the response uncertainty scale revealed a marginal effect of promotion ( $F(2, 173) = 2.57$ ,  $p = .079$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .029$ ). Orthogonal contrasts revealed that those exposed to the one-for-one promotion with a low familiarity target reported greater uncertainty than did those exposed to either the no promotion control or the one-for-one promotion with a high familiarity target ( $F(1, 173) = 5.11$ ,  $p = .025$ ), which did not differ from each other ( $F < 1$ ).

TABLE 3  
Means of Dependent Measures as a Function of Condition in Experiment 5

Measures	Control	One-for-one high familiarity	One-for-one low familiarity
Purchase Intentions	5.33 (2.69)	5.49 (2.75)	4.19 (2.34)
Response Uncertainty	4.89 (2.32)	4.81 (2.11)	5.63 (2.01)
State Selfishness	3.73 (2.03)	3.46 (1.66)	3.43 (1.49)

#### State selfishness

Analysis of the state selfishness scale failed to reveal any effect of promotion ( $F(2, 173) = 0.53$ ,  $p = .593$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .006$ ).

### Discussion

The findings of Experiment 5 offer further evidence that the backfire effect of associating a one-for-one promotion with a hedonic product stems from increased uncertainty associated with recipient preferences. Specifically, associating the one-for-one promotion with the low familiarity target reduced purchase intentions relative to the high familiarity target and the no promotion control. This moderation pattern is not consistent with a selfishness account and instead supports the premise that consumers perceive greater heterogeneity in others' hedonic preferences. Indeed, this pattern aligns with the typical one-for-one paradigm used in our prior studies where the recipient is not specified and is thus highly unfamiliar to participants.

### General Discussion

Cause-marketing initiatives like one-for-one promotions are based on the assumption that consumers are implicitly prone toward socially responsible choices. This assumption is consistent with a wealth of research on consumers' propensity for the well-being of others (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, individual and situational factors can deter prosocial decisions (Botti, Orfali, & Iyengar, 2009; Cialdini et al., 1987; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Kasser & Sheldon, 2000). The goal of this research was to present a novel account based on recipient preferences to understand when and why one-for-one promotions and other in-kind CM initiatives promote versus deter socially responsible choice.

Consistent with this goal, five experiments demonstrate that one-for-one promotions are differentially effective as a function of product type (i.e., whether the product is utilitarian or hedonic). Specifically, when presented with a one-for-one promotion, consumers exhibit a heightened preference for utilitarian products but a reduced preference for hedonic products. This finding replicated across multiple samples, methodologies, and product categories, singular as well as comparative evaluation contexts, and consequential choices.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate: (a) the efficacy of one-for-one promotions is not universal, and (b) product type plays a critical role in delineating when in-kind donations increase or undermine the persuasiveness of the promotion.

This research details the role of recipient preferences in driving the influence of product type on the efficacy of one-for-one promotions. We proposed that consumers' lay beliefs regarding the homogeneity of others' utilitarian preferences increase confidence in purchases paired with one-for-one promotions (e.g., Bazerman et al., 1998; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Maslow, 1943), whereas the heterogeneity of others' hedonic preferences creates uncertainty that undermines such purchases (e.g., Alba & Williams, 2013; He & Bond, 2013; Kivetz & Simonson, 2002). Consistent with this proposition, we observed that certainty about the appropriate response enhanced the efficacy of one-for-one promotions associated with utilitarian products, but that uncertainty regarding the appropriate response for one-for-one promotions associated with hedonic products undermined their efficacy (Experiment 3). Important to the conceptual model, these effects occurred despite controlling for alternative explanations related to the quality of the product, the deservingness of the recipient, the usefulness of the product for the recipient, the perceived wastefulness of the company engaged in the promotion, and the typicality for the company to engage in this promotion.

Further supporting this underlying mechanism conceptual framework, the results from Experiment 4 reveal that the clarity of others' preferences surrounding the charitable donation overrides product type in dictating the efficacy of one-for-one promotions. When participants believed that consumer preferences were homogenous, support for one-for-one promotions—irrespective of product type—was enhanced. However, when participants believed that consumer preferences were heterogenous, support for one-for-one promotions was undermined.

Similarly, Experiment 5 supported this conceptual framework by demonstrating that the familiarity of the recipient influenced the efficacy of the one-for-one promotion. Focusing on hedonic products, the results revealed that associating a one-for-one promotion with a recipient low (rather than high) in familiarity undermined the one-for-one promotion by increasing consumer uncertainty regarding the appropriate response. After all, one would expect preference heterogeneity to increase as familiarity with the recipient decreases. Together, then, these findings demonstrate that product type

shapes the efficacy of one-for-one promotions due to consumer lay beliefs regarding the homogeneity (and thus clarity) of recipient preferences for utilitarian and hedonic products.

It is worth noting that our findings regarding hedonic experiences may seem surprising in light of prior research that shows donations enhance preferences for hedonic products by alleviating feelings of guilt (Strahilevitz, 1999; Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998). Importantly, however, this work examined monetary (rather than in-kind) donations for the purchase of hedonic products. Though monetary donations and in-kind donations vary in multiple ways, this difference is especially relevant to the present research. One would expect greater preference homogeneity and thus greater certainty in monetary (vs. in-kind) donations for hedonic purchases. Said differently, the efficacy of charitable donations associated with hedonic products should be qualified by donation type, such that monetary donations are more persuasive than in-kind (one-for-one) donations. This difference seems especially important given the bulk of research on CM initiatives views charitable donations almost exclusively through the lens of monetary donations (see Table 1 in Appendix S1).

### Theoretical Contributions

These findings offer novel conceptual insight into the differential efficacy of one-for-one promotions, the basis by which one-for-one promotions are differentially effective, and the role of recipient preferences in shaping this basis. In doing so, this research provides a novel theoretical account based on recipient preferences to understand the nuances of CM strategies that rely on prosocial benefits. Specifically, we show the success of one-for-one promotions is critically dependent on the product type. Indeed, while previous CM research has demonstrated that hedonic products coupled with charitable promotions can *increase* purchase intentions by alleviating guilt (Strahilevitz, 1999; Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998), the present research demonstrates that pairing hedonic products with charitable promotions can *undermine* purchase intentions by increasing uncertainty related to recipient preferences.

Moreover, by embracing the role of the recipient, our work further speaks to the role of self-enhancement motives in determining the effectiveness of CM. Though research speaks to the importance of altruistic motives (e.g., Fisher, Vandenbosch, &

Antia, 2008), a wealth of research demonstrates that consumers also engage in charitable contributions to satisfy self-enhancement motives (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997; see Ariely, Bracha, & Meier, 2009). After all, consumers are social creatures who use working models of others to make personal decisions that reflect positively on the self (Dunning, 2007). Our work finds that seemingly small details of the donation decision (i.e., attributes of the donated product) serve as cues that can undermine CM strategies when consumers feel uncertain about what recipients would prefer, as making wrong inferences about others' preferences would reflect poorly on the self. Thus, identifying the clarity of charitable recipient preferences is critical to our understanding of when and how CM initiatives will be most effective (e.g., Wichardt, 2009; Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, & Schwarz, 2006). In doing so, this research not only offers a unique perspective by which to predict when consumers are likely to make choices that help others but also a novel lens to consider the efficacy of CM initiatives like in-kind donations.

Finally, it is worth acknowledging that the current research contributes a conceptual framework to an underdeveloped literature on the efficacy of in-kind donations—with particular relevance to one-for-one promotions. The literature primarily focuses on delineating the efficacy of monetary donations, mostly through lab experiments (see Table 1 in Appendix S1). The present research, however, not only details the importance of factors that implicitly shape consumers' lay beliefs about recipients' preferences (i.e., product type) but also demonstrates how uncertainty in meeting these preferences undermines the persuasive efficacy of in-kind promotions. In doing so, this research provides a conceptual basis by which to further understand when and why CM initiatives that rely on in-kind donations can be both helpful and harmful to consumers' donation behavior.

### New Directions

These findings offer ample directions for future research on the role of social perceptions in cause marketing as a means of better understanding the factors that promote socially conscious choice. Specifically, the present research illustrates the importance of certainty about recipient preferences in dictating the efficacy of one-for-one promotions, which raises questions about the appropriate response in particular donation contexts. For

instance, the controllability of an event surrounding a donation request might impact whether product type undermines the efficacy of one-for-one promotions (Hildebrand et al., 2017). To illustrate, if consumers are told that a recipient was a victim of uncontrollable causes (e.g., a natural disaster or pandemic), the need to provide *whatever assistance* one can muster may remove any unease regarding uncertainty about recipients' hedonic preferences and consequently override potential concerns regarding the appropriateness of the donation.

Additionally, the recipient's identity may determine whether consumers believe they can satisfy the hedonic preferences of some unknown other. Recall we demonstrate that recipient familiarity can reduce uncertainty and increase the efficacy of one-for-one promotions associated with hedonic products (see Experiment 5). Yet there are a host of other factors worth considering. For instance, group status (e.g., in-group vs. out-group; Clarkson, Tormala, Rucker, & Dugan, 2013; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) may impact whether one-for-one promotions associated with hedonic products will backfire. It is possible that shared in-group membership (e.g., a college student triggering a donation of an identical product to a college student in need) or activating a common superordinate group membership (e.g., a company offering an identical in-kind donation to those with shared values) may mitigate the impact of product type on purchase intention, as the certainty about donating a hedonic product to a needy other may be higher when the other is perceived as similar (while remaining a stranger).

Finally, this research provides a novel framework for when and how CM initiatives like one-for-one promotions are most effective and, consequently, provides a unique lens by which to generate promotions that nudge consumers toward socially responsible choice. For instance, in-kind donations that everyone likes—and thus have a high consensus in demand and preference—should reduce uncertainty in consumers, regardless of product type. Similarly, marketers can heighten the homogeneity of recipient preferences (e.g., *America runs on Dunkin*) to reduce the uncertainty surrounding the appropriateness of in-kind donations, and thus increase the efficacy of one-for-one promotions. Finally, marketers can emphasize the perceived familiarity of the in-kind donation recipient (e.g., highlight the location of the charitable recipient, mention potential shared life experiences between donor and recipient, or pair donors and recipients who are in the same age bracket) to reduce the

uncertainty that may arise in response to the prospect of providing a product to someone whose preferences are unknown.

### Conclusion

Five experiments demonstrate the differential effectiveness of one-for-one promotions as a function of product type (utilitarian vs. hedonic). Moreover, this research shows that certainty about recipient preferences—specifically stemming from lay beliefs about the homogeneity/heterogeneity associated with utilitarian/hedonic preferences—is critical in understanding the role of product type in altering the efficacy of these promotions. Collectively, these findings support a preference-based account of one-for-one promotions that speaks to the importance of certainty in determining the factors that enhance or undermine the efficacy of promotions leveraging in-kind prosocial benefits. In doing so, this research outlines the role of product type in dictating the efficacy of one-for-one promotions, details the impact of certainty about recipient preferences on this differential efficacy, and provides a novel perspective to consider the efficacy of CM initiatives that leverage prosocial benefits to be successful.

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### Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's website:

**Appendix S1.** Online supplementary materials.

**Appendix S2.** Methodological Detail Appendix (MDA).