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Who gives to food banks? A study of influences affecting donations to UK food banks by individuals

ABSTRACT

Food banks have become an essential part of the social welfare arrangements of many countries. Food bank managers need to know why some people give to food banks while others do not, as such knowledge will help them devise effective promotional campaigns. The current research applied Norm Activation Theory to examine the motivations and other factors that encourage individuals (as opposed to businesses) to donate foodstuff to food banks in the United Kingdom. Two major research questions were addressed: (1) how do food bank donors and non-donors perceive the attributes of food bank beneficiaries, and (2) what considerations determine the frequencies of donations? The study employed a structural topic model (STM) to analyse the responses of 544 members of the public to an open-ended question regarding the characteristics of typical food bank beneficiaries. Outcomes were then imported to a structural equation model (SEM) containing “frequency of food bank donation” as the dependent variable.

Key words: food banks, norm activation theory, structural topic model, donation behavior.

1. Introduction

Food banks are non-profit organisations that distribute food, free of charge, to people who find it difficult to purchase enough food to avoid hunger, either within themselves or their families. Food insecurity (see end note 1) has become a serious problem in many countries (Garthwaite, 2019; Lawrence, Lyons & Wallington, 2010; Mook, Murdock & Gundersen,

2020) and is associated with numerous adverse health outcomes, both physical and psychological (Mook et al., 2020; Power, Small, Doherty & Pickett, 2020). Food banks receive donations of foodstuff from local fast-food outlets, from retail stores that donate durable food items, and from individual members of the public. The present research was undertaken in London, UK in 2019 and 2020 and examined the giving behavior of individual (rather than business) donors of durable food items to food banks. Few food banks operated in the UK prior to the early years of the current century (Tyler, 2021). Thereafter, however, the number of UK food banks increased rapidly and, by 2020, more than 2,250 UK food banks were distributing food parcels to needy people (IFAN, 2020). By 2020, food banks were evenly spread across the nation (rather than being concentrated in traditionally deprived areas) (Butler, 2017) and were deeply embedded in UK society (Loopstra et al., 2019).

The UK's main food bank provider is the Trussell trust (a religious organisation), which between 1st April and 30th September 2020 owned 1200 food banks and distributed more than 1.2 million emergency food parcels, 470,000 of which went to children. Requests for packages were 89% higher in April 2020 compared to the same month in 2019 (Trussell Trust, 2021), due mainly to declining household incomes resulting from the Covid 19 pandemic. Demand for the Trust's assistance escalated further consequent to the continuation of the pandemic, resulting in the distribution of 2.5 million emergency food parcels during the financial year April 2020 to April 2021. In addition to food banks operated by the Trussell Trust, 1052 independent food banks were owned and run by other organisations in 2020 (IFAN, 2020). A variety of operational models applied to these independent UK food banks. Loopstra et al. (2019) reported the results of a survey of 114 independent food banks which found that 43% were secular and 67% faith based, 56% limited the amount of food given to any one person or family, and 60% required a referral (from a medical doctor, citizens advice bureau, hospital, school, local government officer or social worker). Many

UK food banks are run from schools (see BBC, 2019) and help to feed the 4.5 million children among the 14 million people who in 2020 lived below the UK's official poverty line (Trussell Trust, 2021). (Demand is especially high when no free school meals are available.)

Many academic studies have described (i) the characteristics of food bank beneficiaries (e.g., Tarasuk & Beaton, 1999; Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003; Garthwaite, 2016; Middleton, Mehta, McNaughton & Booth, 2018; Schanes & Stagl, 2019; Tarasuk, Fafard St-Germain & Loopstra, 2020.), and (ii) socio-political factors potentially explaining the substantial increase in the numbers of food banks occurring in western countries over the last two or three decades (e.g., Riches, 2002; Gentelini, 2013; Booth & Whelan, 2014; Downing, Kennedy & Fell, 2014; Bazerghi, McKay & Dunn, 2016). However, apart from a US study by Verpy, Smith & Reicks (2003), research into the demographics and motivations of people who *give* to food banks has been sparse. Indeed, Bazerghi et al's (2016) review of literature about food banks appearing in 35 academic journals did not find a single article that examined donor behavior. Verpy et al's (2003) study of food bank donors involved seven focus groups containing mostly white, high income religious and well-educated participants, half of whom were over age 56, who gave to a wide range of charities and favored giving to children rather than adults. The sample members did not consider the nutritional values of the items they donated and there was a mismatch between the items they gave and the actual needs of the food bank's (mainly ethnic minority) beneficiaries.

1.1 The present study

The present research sought to identify the attitudes towards the users of two food banks and motivations to give or not give to food banks among donors and non-donors who shopped in four supermarkets in South West London: two in a prosperous district of Kingston-upon-Thames and two in a less prosperous area of the same Borough. One of the food banks was

an independent entity and operated from a church hall; the other belonged to a national chain of food banks.

1.1.1 Importance of the research

Research of this kind is important for a number of reasons. Food bank managers need to know why some people give whereas others do not, as this knowledge will help them to devise advertisements, construct appropriate point-of-donation displays, and create suitable content for social media communication that are most likely to attract donations (Harland, Staats & Wilke, 2007). Secondly, since many food banks exhibit heavy reliance on a narrow range of supporters, notably local businesses (Fitzsimons, 2017), they will benefit from knowledge that enables them to broaden their range of donors. Thirdly, because food banks now play crucial roles in the social welfare arrangements of many nations (Bulman, 2018; Middleton et al, 2018), information regarding the food bank sector should be of great interest to government public health and nutrition agencies. Fourthly, as food banks require financial donations to pay for warehouses, refrigerated space for perishables, vehicle purchase and maintenance, administration and volunteer recruitment, a knowledge of the characteristics of food bank donors should assist food bank managers when promoting their outlets in order to attract monetary donations. (Gifts of cash enable food banks to buy food wholesale and to ensure that purchased items are suitable for beneficiaries' requirements.)

2. Theoretical foundations

The study was based on the Norm Activation Model (Schwartz, 1977); suitably adapted for the requirements of the present investigation. The Norm Activation Model (NAM) has been widely used to explain why individuals give to others (see Waqas et al., 2018). While several versions of the NAM exist, all variations assess the effects of personal norms on altruistic behavior. "Personal norms", according to Schwartz (1977) are "actively experienced as

feelings of moral obligation towards others” (p. 277), and as such directly influence philanthropic decisions. The NAM assumes that personal norms are usually associated with (i) awareness of the existence of a problem and knowledge of the adverse consequences of *not* giving to a good cause (cf. Erlandsson, Nilsson & Västfjäll, 2018), and (ii) possession of strong views concerning the ascription of responsibility for the problem.

In the present context (i) ascription relates to views regarding whether or not the poor are *themselves* responsible for their poverty (see Harland et al., 2007), and (ii) knowledge of the consequences of not giving can lead to feelings of guilt if an individual fails to make a donation (Onwezen, Antonides & Bartels, 2013). Further elements of NAM models are (i) social norms, e.g., the influences of views about a problem expressed by significant others (notably friends, family and workmates), and (ii) perceived behavioral control, i.e., the belief that making an effort to alleviate a problem will actually make a difference (cf. De Groot & Steg, 2009; Shin, Im, Jung & Severt, 2018). Configurations of the abovementioned NAM variables have differed markedly among investigations. In the words of Lemmens, Ruiter, Veldhuizen & Schaalma (2007), “it is not clear how awareness of consequences, ascription of responsibility and personal norms are related to each other” (p. 182). Thus, disparities have occurred vis-à-vis; for example, whether an NAM variable is an antecedent or a consequence or is a mediator or a moderator (see De Groot & Steg, 2009; Harland et al., 2007) for details of literature relating to this matter). Some studies (e.g., Fang, Chiang, Ng & Lo, 2009) assumed that ascription of responsibility and realisation of consequences *activated* personal norms, resulting in philanthropic giving. Hence, low ascription and awareness were said to cause an individual to deny the existence of a problem and/or to reject personal responsibility for helping alleviate its consequences. Other NAM research has viewed awareness and ascription as *moderators* that affect the strength of a direct link between personal norms and giving (see for example De Groot & Steg, 2007; Esfahani, Ramayah & Rahman, 2017;

Schultz & Zelezny, 1998; Schwartz & Howard, 1980; Vining & Ebreo, 1992). Thus, norm activation theory is flexible and the exact configuration of a model may be crafted according to the specific purpose of an investigation (De Groot & Steg, 2009).

3. Conceptual model

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Figure 1 shows the conceptual model applied in the present study. Following the moderation approach employed in much of the NAM literature cited above, the model employs a moderated configuration of variables covered by norm activation theory. This was chosen in preference to a mediation NAM model, which would involve a chain of causality from awareness of a problem through to ascription of responsibility and then to the activation of personal norms (see De, Groot & Steg, 2009). In the present context, however, awareness of consequences does not necessarily precede and significantly determine ascription of responsibility (cf. Hopper & Nielsen, 1991; Schultz & Zelezny, 1998). Rather, and following Schwartz (1977), Figure 1 implies that high awareness of consequences and high ascription of responsibility each increase the effects of personal norms on behavior. If ascription and awareness are low then, according to Schwartz (1977), personal norms are less likely to influence behavior because denial of awareness and responsibility may neutralise feelings of obligation to behave altruistically (see also De Groot & Steg, 2009).

Personal norms are interpreted as innate overarching values of a general nature that are presumed to exert causal influences on two functional variables, i.e., a person's attitudes towards poverty (cf. Greevey, 2014), and perceptions of the characteristics of food bank users. They also have a direct impact on decisions to donate (or not donate) to a food bank. The two functional variables constitute separate constructs because an individual might interpret the general issue of poverty in one way, but the characteristics of food bank users in

another. It is likely nevertheless that the former will affect the latter, as shown in Figure 1. Studies have explored various views relating to people's attitudes towards poverty, e.g., that the poor are poor due to their personal deficiencies (laziness, irresponsibility and/or ignorance), or because of unfair and inadequate economic structures, or consequent to personal misfortune (e.g., disability or debilitating illness) (for details of relevant literature see Bradshaw [2007]; Townsend [1979]; Yun & Weaver [2010]). The matter is important because "public attitudes inform the level of support for action by government and others to tackle poverty" (Hall, Leary & Greevy, 2014, p. 10). Following Yun and Weaver (2010) and Hall, Leary and Greevy (2014), Figure 1 assumes that attitudes concerning poverty may be affected by personal experience of being poor and that this experience also impacts independently on decisions to donate.

NAM studies normally include social norms and perceived behavioral control (Onwezen et al., 2013). Hence, Figure 1 posits that perceived behavioral control has a direct influence on donation decisions. In line with past NAM studies, the strength of the connection between personal norms and giving is assumed to be moderated by social norms (cf. Han, 2014; Onwezen et al., 2013; Setiawan, Afiff & Heruwasto, 2020) and also by awareness of consequences and ascription of responsibility (De Groot & Steg, 2007; Schultz et al., 2005). This approach follows prior research findings that personal norms are not *caused* in a linear fashion by awareness of consequences of not giving and/or by the ascription of responsibility (cf. De Groot & Steg, 2007; Esfahani et al., 2017; Schultz et al., 2005; Schultz & Zelezny, 1998). High values of the moderators are assumed to increase the impact of personal norms on intent (see Milfont, Sibley & Duckitt, 2010). Ignoring these moderating influences in a NAM study "can lead to erroneous conclusions that personal norms do not affect intention" (Lemmens et al., 2007 p. 182).

Donation behavior has been found to depend on a plethora of variables such as altruism, empathy, warm glow experienced when giving, and so on. While it is not possible to include all of these variables in the model, an individual's past record of charity giving *in general* is indicative of the consequences of these variables, as it captures their major effects (Bennett, 2019). Standard demographic controls are included in the model.

4. Materials and methods

Shoppers leaving the four supermarkets were asked to complete a questionnaire covering the variables shown in Figure 1. Each supermarket had a large box labelled "Food bank donations" (or equivalent wording) located in the checkout area of the store. Three hundred and nineteen responses were gathered from donors (155 in the more prosperous area) and 371 from non-donors (164 in the more prosperous area). Replies were obtained by the researchers plus four unpaid volunteer postgraduate students who had attended a training event on how to approach prospective interviewees in a professional manner. As the donation boxes were next to exit doors the participants were approached on pavements next to the exits. (The supermarkets were content to allow this to happen.) At the start of the questionnaire the participants were asked a single open-ended question worded: "what comes into your mind when you think about the sorts of people who go to and receive food from a food bank?". Thereafter, items in the questionnaire were read out to the participants, who were asked to give a number between one and five indicating their level of agreement with each item. The responses were recorded by the researchers. Demographic and other factual matters were queried directly.

The questionnaire is summarised in the Appendix to the paper together with (i) literature sources of the items, (ii) Cronbach's alpha values and leading eigenvalues of the

reflective multi-item constructs measured by more than three items, and (iii) multiple correlation figures for three-item constructs.

4.1 Structural topic model

Since little is known about “perceptions of food bank users” (the central mediating variable in Figure 1), an open-ended structural topic modelling (STM) research methodology (Roberts et al., 2014; Roberts, Stewart & Tingley, 2018) was applied to examine the views of the participants in the study. STM is a semi-automated machine-learning qualitative research method that identifies latent structures within responses to open-ended questions. It is appropriate for use in situations where nothing is known about an issue. Responses are organised into a number of “topics” defined by the homogeneity of participants’ comments within each topic. A clustering algorithm examines the co-occurrence of words across responses and assigns words to topics, the number of which is pre-specified by the researcher. The algorithm computes how closely a person’s responses belong to each topic (e.g., 15% to topic one; 30% to topic two, and so on; the percentages summing to 100). Aggregated across individuals, these “topic prevalence” figures (i.e., the degrees to which responses belong to various topics) can be related to the sample members’ personal characteristics. Frequently occurring words arising in relation to each topic may be identified and the most representative answers cited. To establish the correct number of topics the model is computed for differing numbers of topics (e.g., two to eight) and the most coherent solution (in terms of internal homogeneity and the greatest level of discrimination) is selected (for details see Roberts et al., [2014]). Topics *emerge* from the data and are not pre-assumed. Words can belong to more than one topic and topics can themselves be correlated. Importantly, there is no need for the researcher to construct a coding scheme.

4.2 Pre-tests of the questionnaire

Two pre-tests of the questionnaire were undertaken: the first involving administration of the first draft of the questionnaire to 10 shoppers leaving the supermarkets in each of the four locations. This identified ambiguities and overlapping items. The questionnaire was then discussed with (i) two senior academics independently engaged on food bank research, and (ii) the managers of the food banks participating in the study. A second pre-test of the (amended) questionnaire was completed via a snowballing exercise on social media platforms, resulting in 101 replies: 26 from food bank donors. Minor adjustments were made to the document for use in the final investigation.

5. Results

Table 1 reports the profile of the members of the sample, from which it can be seen that the characteristics of both sets of respondents were broadly similar, including the perception of financial security (implying that people regularly did their shopping in areas away from their places of residence).

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Patterns of response to the main sections of the questionnaire of the participants shopping in the more prosperous and less prosperous areas were similar, and as there was little difference between the demographic profiles of the two groups. Hence, the data for the two groups were combined. Post-hoc, estimations of the model were completed for each set of data, no meaningfully significant disparities emerging.

5.1 Outcomes to the STM

A three-topic STM solution emerged from the pooled data of participants in both areas who had donated to a food bank (N = 319). Examination of the responses to the open-ended question by the researchers suggested that the first topic related to the concept of food bank beneficiaries' "deservingness". Topic two seemingly involved the "vulnerability" of food

bank users; while topic three appeared to imply that food bank users were “victims” of an unfair society. A three-topic solution applied also to the non-donating sample members (N = 371). Here, the first topic contained words characterising food bank beneficiaries as “mendicant”, i.e., as beggars, substance abusers, down and outs, and so on. The second topic contained words based on the assumption that food bank users were “undeserving” (but without being mendicant). Words in topic three seemed to employ terms relating to “apathy”, i.e., to people simply not having thought about giving food to the poor. Tables 2 and 3 present representative words, phrases and comments relating to the topics obtained for each group of participants.

INSERT TABLES 2 AND 3 HERE

5.2 Estimation of the model

As the model contained a mixture of formative and reflective constructs and because standard tests for normality revealed that several variables were not normally distributed, estimation of Figure 1 used the method of partial least squares via the SmartPLS package (Ringle, Wende & Becker, 2015). The bootstrap facility of SmartPLS was employed for the estimations (5,000 runs). Two estimations were completed, the first of which evaluated the model shown in Figure 1 for the data on respondents who had donated to food banks. Here the dependent variable was the frequency with which a person donated (five-point scale, see item 7 of the Appendix). Donation frequency was used as the dependent variable because the results revealed that donors typically gave just one or two items with a total value of less than £3. Hence there was insufficient variation in the data to support an analysis. Many participants could not recall the monetary value of the items they donated, and over half the respondents chose not answer this question. Only one of the controls (“religiosity”) and one demographic variable (number of children, i.e., the more children the lower the likelihood of a person

giving to a food bank) attained significance. Hence, the other controls and demographic variables were removed from the analysis.

The second estimation involved people who had never donated. This spotlighted influences on non-donors' perceptions of food bank beneficiaries with respect to the topics emerging from the STM. Table 4 gives the results of the estimation of Figure 1 for the participants who donated to food banks; Table 5 presents the outcomes relating to non-donors.

INSERT TABLES 4 AND 5 HERE

5.2.1 Diagnostics

All variance inflation factors had a value of less than five, indicating the absence of technically damaging multicollinearity. All inter-construct correlations (excluding those involving the formatively constructed variables) were less than the within-construct correlations of constructs measured via multiple items, and all HTMT statistics were less than value 0.6, thus confirming sound discriminant validity. Construct reliabilities for the reflective latent variables ranged from .76 to .81, affirming satisfactory convergent validity. The predictive validity of the model was assessed by removing every seventh data point of the frequency of donation variable and re-estimating the model. Stone-Geisser Q^2 values are shown in Tables 4 and 5, all indicating adequate prediction. Since ascription of responsibility and awareness of consequences were measured formatively, the two-stage procedure of SmartPLS was used to test the influence of the moderators (see Hair, Hult., Ringle & Sarsedt, 2017). The effect sizes of the moderators were substantial ($f^2 > .23$ in all cases) and all T-values on moderating coefficients were significant (see Table 4).

5.2.2 Tests for response bias

A test for the possible presence of social desirability bias (i.e., participants exaggerating their philanthropic behavior) was completed via an examination of the means and standard deviations of variables that a priori might be expected to have given rise to bias. Additionally, a test for common method bias (possibly arising from a tendency of the respondents to agree [or disagree] with most of the questions) was undertaken by totalling and comparing the percentages of extreme responses (strongly agree or strongly disagree) among the explanatory variables. There was no visible evidence of either social desirability or common method bias.

6. Discussion

Donors' comments underlying the three topics listed in Table 2 confirm the view that many people who give to food banks believe that the government has a responsibility to take care of citizens who experience food insecurity (cf. Bazerghi, MacKay & Dunn, 2019; Bulman, 2018; Downing et al., 2014; Garthwaite, 2019). Participants who donate seemingly tend to regard society as unfair and to impose on the poor numerous health and other issues as well as the financial problems that lead to food poverty (Mook et al., 2020; Power et al., 2020). Non-donors, conversely, appear likely to agree with critics of food banks who allege that they encourage laziness and dependency among the undeserving (see Booth & Whelan, 2014; Garthwaite, 2016; Loopstra et al., 2015; Power et al., 2020; Stone & Hirsch, 2019). Often, critics maintain, the use of a food bank derives mostly from misspending and failures to budget and not from poverty *per se* (Van de Horst et al., 2014).

Table 4 offers a generally sound fit between the sample data and norm activation theory, and suggests that a NAM configuration with moderating variables was appropriate for the investigation (cf. De Groot & Steg, 2009; Esfaheni et al., 2017; Schwartz & Howard, 1980). Only three issues (none directly associated with the NAM) failed to correspond with

predictions. The first was the insignificance of the hypothesised connection between attitudes towards poverty and the frequency of giving to food banks (cf. Bradshaw, 2007; Hall et al., 2014; Yun & Weaver, 2010), meaning that although many people with positive attitudes towards poverty gave to food banks, so did many people who held negative attitudes. This implies that many individuals with negative attitudes regarded food banks as somehow different to other types of charities that deal with poverty. Possibly this resulted from the attention paid by the mass media to the activities of food banks during the Covid pandemic. Secondly, the proposed link between personal experience of poverty and frequency of donation was insignificant. It appears that people with no personal experience of poverty were still prepared to give to food banks. Again, this indicates a mental distinction between some of the participants' opinions about poverty *in general* as opposed to attitudes regarding food insecurity. These outcomes indicate the existence of a broad potential donor base for food banks. Issue three concerns the insignificance of perceived behavioral control as a determinant of frequency of giving (see Onwezen et al., 2013). This could mean that although some participants did not believe that gifts would make much difference to the overall problem of food insecurity; they were still willing to give regularly to a food bank. General tendencies towards altruism among the sample members may have generated this outcome.

Table 5 spotlights potential influences on non-donors' perceptions of food bank users of the three variables hypothesised to affect the three topics emerging from the non-donor STM. Attitudes regarding poverty impacted negatively and significantly on topic 1 (beneficiaries are mendicant) and topic 2 (undeserving) but not on topic 3 (apathy). Hence, it appears that apathy was present both among people who held positive views vis-à-vis the causes of poverty and individuals whose views were negative. For all three topics, and as anticipated a priori, negative opinions were lower among participants holding strong personal philanthropic norms and with personal experience of poverty.

The study did not construct a separate model to explain non-donors' decisions not to give. However, Table 6 shows the correlations between the three topics applicable to non-donors and the key variables in Figure 1. The view that food bank users are mendicant or undeserving was negatively and significantly associated with social norms favouring the poor (see Setiawan et al., 2020), with perceived behavioral control and with positive general donation history. Apathy was not significantly connected with social norms, but was influenced negatively by perceived behavioral control and positive donation history.

7. Conclusion

The results provide food bank managers with a framework for devising promotional campaigns to attract individual donors. Knowing the attitudes and motivations of individual donors and non-donors creates a number of possibilities for improving the management of food bank marketing (cf. Gorczyca & Hartman, 2017). Possession of such knowledge can help food bank managers to (i) broaden the range of donors to a food bank beyond fast food organisations and retail stores, (ii) reach sizeable, actionable, new segments of individual donors, and (iii) construct targeted communication strategies. Campaigns should emphasise awareness of the consequences of not giving, and should ascribe responsibility for food insecurity to the state and to the wider community rather than to food bank beneficiaries. Themes connected with the personal norms listed in the Appendix section 2 should be woven into campaign materials. Religious people seemed to be more ready than others to donate to food banks, so advertisements in religious media are likely to be worthwhile.

Substantial differences occurred between the perceptions of food bank beneficiaries held by people who did and who did not donate items to food banks, and disparate topic structures emerged from the STM analysis of the two groups. This is a disturbing result for food bank managers because sympathetic characterisations of food bank beneficiaries were

associated with higher frequencies of giving. Anything capable of improving public perceptions of food bank users, e.g., celebrity endorsements or published case studies of the plights of specific highly deserving beneficiaries (health care workers or households with children for example), should be included in campaigns. Food banks have been described as a private sector market-led solution to a social problem caused by welfare reform (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003). Their existence provides evidence of “want amidst plenty”; a situation that causes disquiet among some better-off people. Financially comfortable members of the UK public might not realise the extent and consequences of poverty within the country (Hall et al., 2014). If so, then informational materials that explain the gravity of the situation might attract fresh financially well-off donors. Giving to a food bank could perhaps constitute a symbolic gesture of recognition of the presence of “poverty among plenty” among individuals who were previously ignorant about the extent of food insecurity (Tarasuk & Eakin, 2003).

Many members of the sample did not believe that their gifts would make much difference to the overall problem of food insecurity; yet these individuals were still willing to give. This could indicate that the people involved spent little time thinking about donating foodstuff, since placing a food item in a supermarket collection box is a relatively simple, convenient, low effort activity and low monetary stakes are involved. Thus, marketers might not need to worry about devising messages containing the theme “every little helps”; as such messages may be unlikely to stimulate giving.

7.1 Benefits to the individual of donating to food banks and barriers to giving

Table 1 shows two major areas of difference between donors and non-donors, namely the variables measuring personal norms and attitudes towards poverty. Certain moral outlooks and lack of feelings of responsibility towards the poor seemingly constituted significant

barriers to giving (cf. Heiser, 2006). To address this issue, fundraisers need to create images of beneficiaries as *deserving* individuals who are *morally* worthy of assistance. This might attract individuals who currently donate to several charities but not to food banks. As regards attitudes towards poverty, Hall et al. (2014) observed that many UK residents fail to believe that *anyone* in the UK can be in “poverty”, as the notion of poverty is associated in their minds with “the Third World” (p. 12). (This is far from the truth, however, as relative to median national household income, poverty within the UK is increasingly common [Francis-Devine, 2020].). People holding such beliefs must be encouraged to consider the fact that many individuals can be thrust into poverty consequent to low pay, high living costs and involuntary unemployment, and to recognise the nearness of “ordinary people” to food insecurity. Also, the fact that some key UK workers (including nurses, teachers and employees of care homes) are now compelled to use food banks could create an opportunity to employ powerful promotional messages based on these new realities. Media interest in the beneficiaries of food banks is likely to grow, given that it is an odd phenomenon to have so many food bank users in one of the most advanced economies in the world. Extensive media coverage could enable food bank managers to tie their messages to media reports and to piggy-back on stories that appear in the mainstream news media.

Bennett (2019) observed how giving to charity can create warm glow in a donor and may provide other emotional benefits, higher self-esteem for instance. Accordingly, fundraisers should accentuate feelings of warm, glow in appeals and show how food bank donors can experience these agreeable sensations. Messages should emphasise the sense of satisfaction that a person will enjoy through making a contribution to a local food bank. Highly emotional imagery which stimulates compassion and empathy might be useful in this respect. The study identified apathy as a barrier to giving. To deal with this, a food bank could recruit volunteers to *physically* pick-up items of food from donating individuals’

residences, thus making it easy for people who otherwise might be apathetic about giving to a food bank to begin to donate. Drop off points in supermarkets and in public places need to be attractively designed and highly visible and, if possible, should display pictures and text that exemplify recipients' circumstances.

7.2 Limitations and areas for further research

The study was conducted in two districts of a single London Borough. Although, on the average, the residents of one of the districts were less prosperous than inhabitants of the other, the income levels of people in the disadvantaged area were by national (and certainly by international) standards, quite high. It would be useful, therefore, to replicate the present study in locations where incomes are well below the national poverty level. Few significant differences arose between participants who shopped in the prosperous area and those who shopped in the low-income area, and the disparities were predictable. If this outcome applies generally across food banks in all areas there will be little point in customising promotional messages to suit specific locations segmented by average income. The model created for the present study was necessarily parsimonious. Case studies focusing on specific individual variables would contribute substantially to knowledge about food bank donors. An examination of possible links between self-congruence and giving to food banks would be especially worthwhile.

End note

1. Food insecurity has been defined as “the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable nutritious food” (Loopstra et al., 2015 p.3). It is normally measured in categories relating to hunger experienced in the previous 30 days. Categories range from the most severe (category 4), whereby children in a household are experiencing hunger and adults are repeatedly reducing food intake; through category 3 (adults experience

hunger but no reduced food intake for children); to lower categories that involve moderate hunger (see Tarasuk & Beaton, 1999). Food insecurity has been estimated to affect between two and eight per cent of the UK population (Loopstra et al., 2015).

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APPENDIX: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Demographics and controls

Age, gender, education level, household structure (single parent / number of children [Landon, Kyle & Kaiser, 2017]). Are you a religious person (five-point agree / disagree scale)?

Ethnicity: 5 broad categories as observed by the people collecting the data; the respondents were only asked about their ethnicity in cases of doubt

Financial security (Yun & Weaver, 2010): five-point scale, 5 = very secure, 1 = very insecure

Politically I regard myself as: right of centre; in the middle; left of centre (or “don’t know”)

Open-ended question concerning perceptions of users of food banks

What words come into your mind when you think about the typical kind of person who uses a food bank? Please give a brief description of such people.

2. Personal norms (Harland et al., 2007; Norlund, Jansson & Westin, 2016) (All sample Lambda = 3.9; Cronbach’s alpha = .81)

- (a) Giving to the poor is morally the right thing to do
- (b) I am happy and willing to put great effort into helping those in need
- (c) I would feel guilty if I did not give to charity
- (d) I feel a personal responsibility for protecting the poor
- (e) My personal values cause me to feel a strong obligation to give to people in need

3. Attitudes regarding poverty (Yun & Weaver, 2010). (Formative construct)

- (a) People living in poverty are poor due to circumstances beyond their control
- (b) Governments and society generally have a responsibility to help people living in poverty
- (c) People who are poor should not be blamed for their misfortune
- (d) People living in poverty are unfairly discriminated against
- (e) The government should introduce many more programmes to support the poor

4. Personal experience of poverty. Items created for the present study. (R = .88)

- (a) I certainly know what it is like to live in poverty
- (b) I have personal experience of barely having the basic necessities of life

5. General donation history. (Formative construct)

- (a) How often do you donate to charity (never; once every two weeks; four weeks, six weeks, eight weeks; three months; six months; 12 months; longer than 12 months.)?
- (b) How many other charities do you donate to?

6. Perceived behavioral control (Norlund et al., 2016) (R = .79)

- (a) There is little use in my giving to a food bank because it will not make any difference to the situation facing the poor (reverse scored)
- (b) Even if my contribution to a food bank is small, it is still important as a means for decreasing hunger
- (c) I can influence the food poverty situation by giving to a food bank

7. Gives / does not give to a food bank.

I give to a food bank: 6 = every time I shop; 5 = at least once every two weeks; 4 = at least once every four weeks; 3 = at least once every six weeks; 2 = at least once every eight weeks; 1 = once every ten weeks or longer; 0 = never

On average what is the total money value of the food items you donate each time you shop?

8. Awareness of consequences (Onwezen et al. 2013). (Formative construct)

- (a) It is essential to give to food banks because there are so many people living in food poverty
- (b) Food poverty is a dreadful condition for anyone to have to experience
- (c) Food poverty cannot and must not be ignored
- (d) The effects of food poverty on individuals are worse than most people realise

9. Ascribed responsibility (De Groot & Steg, 2007; Onwezen et al. 2013) (Formative construct)

- (a) I do not feel that we, as a society, are responsible for the fact that many of the country's citizens experience food poverty
- (b) Typically, financially poor people have only themselves to blame for being poor
- (c) Together with everyone else, I feel that I am jointly responsible for the problems that have led to the food poverty that exists in our country (reverse scored)
- (d) Food poverty results mainly from people not being able to budget, and not from government policies

10. Social norms (Han, 2014) (R = .83)

(a) Most people who are important to me would agree that I should give to a food bank

(b) People whose opinions I value would want me to give to a food bank

(c) Most of my friends, relatives, work colleagues and acquaintances would approve of my giving to a food bank

TABLE 1. SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

	PROSPEROUS AREA		LOW-INCOME AREA	
	<i>Donors</i>	<i>Non-donors</i>	<i>Donors</i>	<i>Non-donors</i>
Average age	39.4	39.9	37.9	38.6
Percentage female	48%	44%	50%	54%
Education level:				
- post school but without a degree	55%	50%	47%	50%
- has a degree level qualification	28%	30%	28%	26%
Number of children in household	1.9	1.8	2.0	1.9
Single parent	17%	19%	16%	18%
Feel financially secure:				
- top 2 categories of 5-point scale	29%	26%	26%	26%
- bottom 3 categories	37%	36%	35%	34%
Someone in household is in paid employment	92%	89%	88%	90%
Ethnicity				
- white	61%	66%	68%	60%
- Indian sub-continent	18%	16%	18%	14%
- other	21%	18%	14%	26%
Religiosity (% responding in top two categories of 5-point scale)	44%	48%	40%	40%
Politically I regard myself as:				
- right of centre	28%	30%	32%	26%
- left of centre	32%	30%	32%	28%
- no opinion	40%	40%	36%	46%
Personal norms (mean of composite)	3.76	3.11	3.06	3.55
Attitude to poverty (mean)	3.89	3.55	3.55	3.62
Personal experience of poverty (mean)	2.12	2.02	2.28	2.25
Donation frequency: charities generally (mode)	Quarterly	Quarterly	Quarterly	Quarterly
Number of other charities to which the person donates (mean)	1.34	1.20	1.22	1.30
Perceived behavioral control (mean)	3.66	3.50	3.47	3.60
Frequency of giving to a food bank among food bank donors (mode)	Monthly		Monthly	

Awareness of consequences (mean)	3.92	3.88	3.61	3.88
Ascribed responsibility (mean)	3.36	3.40	3.44	3.18
Social norms (mean)	3.86	3.68	3.68	3.83

TABLE 2. STM ANALYSIS: DONORS TO FOOD BANKS

<i>Topic number and label</i>	<i>Prevalence (mean average) (%)</i>	<i>Most common words and phrases*</i>	<i>Representative comment</i>
1. DESERVING POOR	45%	Pitiful, needy, deserve better, distressing, heart-breaking.	Oh, the pity of it, to see single mothers having to beg for food. I am really touched by all this; they (food bank beneficiaries) need food for their kids and need it right now – no ifs, no buts.
2. VULNERABLE POOR	37%	Helpless, struggling, vulnerable, hardship, need protection.	These people constantly hover on the edge of poverty. They live in lousy rented accommodation and when the rent goes up, they have even less (money) to spend on food. If they work, they have to take anything they can get and at whatever lousy wage is offered.
3. VICTIMISED POOR	18%	Shame (on the government), spending cuts, austerity, victims of discrimination, victims of the social welfare system.	It's so unfair this could happen in an affluent country like this (England). It is a disgrace on all of us to let this happen; it's not their fault to be poor.

**The words and phrases shown are summary interpretations of the many words and phrases used to describe these feelings.*

TABLE 3. STM ANALYSIS: NON-DONORS

<i>Topic number and label</i>	<i>Prevalence (mean average) (%)</i>	<i>Most common words and phrases*</i>	<i>Representative comment</i>
1. MENDICANT POOR	30%	Drugs (abuse of), homeless (living on the streets), benefit scroungers, incapable, beggars.	They need to get a life instead of sponging off others. Taking stuff from a food bank is just as bad as begging on a street corner.
2. UNDESERVING POOR	30%	Own fault (to be in this situation), lazy, too many children, feckless, down and outs.	They don't deserve the goods they are given. There is no unemployment round here, you can get a job tomorrow if you want one, and the money (wage level) isn't bad either. If they sorted themselves out they would not have to use food banks.
3. NON-DONOR APATHY	40%	Never thought of it. I might in the future. Not on my radar. I will think on it. I know I should, but never got round to it.	To be honest it has never crossed my mind. I get so many letters from charities asking me to donate that the idea of giving to yet another (good cause) is not something I think about.

**The words and phrases shown are summary interpretations of the many words and phrases used to describe these feelings.*

TABLE 4. DETERMINANTS OF FOOD BANK DONORS' FREQUENCY OF GIVING

<i>Dependent Variables</i>					
<i>Explanatory Variables</i>	T1: Deserving	T2: Vulnerable	T3: Victimised	Attitudes Regarding Poverty	Frequency of Giving to Food Banks
T1: Deserving					.38 (4.14)**
T2: Vulnerable					.25 (2.24)*
T3: Victimised					.25 (2.25)*
Attitudes Regarding Poverty	.37 (2.95)*	.28 (2.60)*	.32 (3.00)**		.10 (1.05)
Personal Experience of Poverty	.04 (0.88)	.11 (0.10)	.14 (1.14)	.31 (3.20)**	.10 (1.43)
Personal Norms	.39 (3.39)**	.29 (3.00)**	.28 (3.13)**	.39 (3.74)**	.41 (3.06)**
Perceived Behavioral Control					.02 (0.09)
General Donation History					.40 (4.00)**
Number of Children					-.38 (3.00)**
Religiosity					.30 (2.88)*
Moderators:					

- Awareness of Consequences of Not Giving					.066 (4.11)**
- Ascription of Responsibility					.047 (3.66)**
- Social Norms					.052 (3.87)**
R ²	.44	.39	.37	.38	.59

*Standardised coefficients. T-values in parentheses. *Indicates significance at the .05 level or below; **at the .01 level or below. Stone-Geisser Q² = .34. Standardised Root Mean Square Residual = .058.*

TABLE 5. DETERMINANTS OF NON-DONORS' PERCEPTIONS OF FOOD BANK USERS

<i>Explanatory Variables</i>	<i>Dependent Variables</i>			
	Attitudes Regarding Poverty	T1: Mendicant	T2: Undeserving	T3: Apathy
Attitudes Regarding Poverty		-.33 (4.00)**	-.28 (2.98)**	.08 (0.08)
Personal Experience of Poverty	.28 (2.11)*	-.38 (3.77)**	-.30 (3.00)**	-.19 (1.99)*
Personal Norms	-.40 (4.14)**	-.42 (3.88)**	.41 (4.13)**	-.27 (2.00)*
R ²	.40	.52	.44	.31

*Standardised coefficients. T-values in parentheses. *Indicates significance at the .05 level or below; **at the .01 level or below.*

TABLE 6. KEY CORRELATIONS: NON-DONORS

Topic 1: Mendicant	1							
Topic 2: Undeserving	.51 (2.99)**	1						
Topic 3: Apathy	.09 (0.77)	.14 (1.33)	1					
Awareness of Consequences	.10 (1.05)	-.12 (1.07)	.08 (0.08)	1				
Ascription of Responsibility	.12 (1.20)	-.07 (0.99)	-.11 (0.99)	.16 (1.12)	1			
Social Norms	-.47 (3.34)**	-.44 (3.22)**	.10 (1.10)	-.08 (0.09)	.41 (4.05)	1		
Perceived Behavioral Control	-.45 (3.66)**	-.40 (3.00)**	-.30 (2.66)**	.33 (2.00)**	.22 (1.99)*	.22 (2.12)*	1	
General Donation History	-.34 (2.02)*	-.23 (1.99)*	-.32 (2.99)**	.40 (3.86)**	.40 (3.22)**	.24 (2.80)**	.48 (4.77)**	1

**Indicates significance at the .01 level or less, *at the .05 level or less.

FIGURE 1. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

