

# Less is More? Maximizing Charitable Donations during Crises: An Online Field Experiment \*

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## Abstract

This paper examines the optimal choice set size in an online donation setting. We randomize the number of beneficiaries (3, 8, or 10) per screen (*screen size*) in a field experiment. *Across screens*, the total number and value of donations are highest in the 8-beneficiary treatment (pre-registered). To explore underlying mechanisms, we conduct an exploratory analysis and find that the results are largely driven by differences in refresh rates and beneficiary exposure (choice overload and search behavior). In the 3-beneficiary treatment, donors refresh twice as often but view only half as many beneficiaries compared to the 8- and 10-beneficiary treatments (12 vs 25). *Within screens*, we classify self-written beneficiary narratives using both manual and machine learning methods to extract key characteristics. Beneficiaries perceived as *more deserving* receive larger donations (exploratory). Finally, we observe strong evidence of female in-group bias (pre-registered), likely due to the heightened saliency of female poverty among female donors in a male breadwinner context. This study highlights low-cost choice architecture adjustments to maximize donations.

**JEL Classification:** D64, O10, C93, D91

**Keywords:** Field Experiment, Charitable Giving, Online Donations, Choice Architecture

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