

# Message and Messenger: Injunctive vs. Descriptive Norms

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## Introduction

Imagine receiving two appeals for your donation to a particular charity on a college campus. One used a famous celebrity known for his philanthropy, while the other used a psychology student from your class. What if you knew the percentage of students who gave to this charity? How would that motivate you?

According to the focus theory of normative conduct<sup>1</sup> (Cialdini, Reno & Kallgren, 1990), social norms can mobilize behavior, especially when they are made salient or focal in a specific situation. We examined the relative influence of each type of norm depending on the source of the norm message: a peer group member or an authority figure. We predicted that descriptive norm messages will be more influential when delivered by a peer group member while injunctive norm messages will be more influential when delivered by a celebrity.

The rationale for this prediction is that a peer group member brings salience and credibility to a descriptive norm more than a celebrity who is outside the group because group members would perceive the peer to have the same motivations and perspective as the group members and the celebrity to have dissimilar motivations and perspective. However, a celebrity should be more influential in delivering an injunctive norm message than a peer group member because a celebrity's endorsements garner automatic credibility and brings attention to any issue he or she supports because of the celebrity's fame and his or her fans' desire to emulate them.

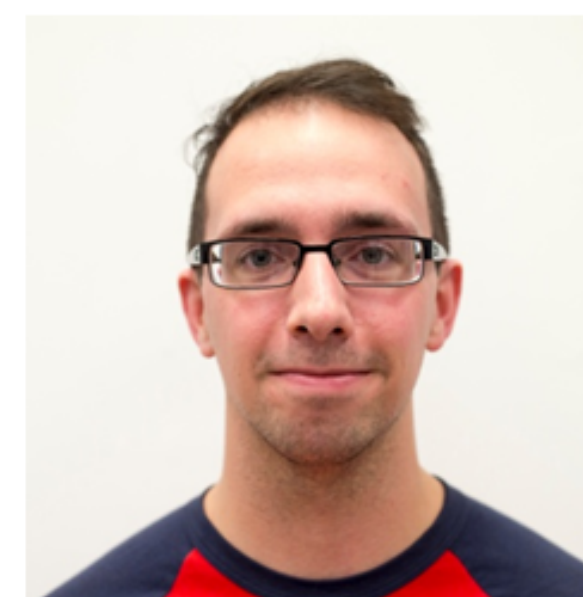
## Methods

- N= 198 undergraduate psychology students
- Online survey
- Hypothetical Scenario: Imagine being paid \$2.00 for participating in today's study
- Participants received one of four messages
- Peer Injunctive
- Celebrity Injunctive
- Peer Descriptive
- Celebrity Descriptive

## Methods



### Descriptive



My name is James. I am a student here on campus just like you and a committed environmentalist.

Did you know that more than 80% of us donate to an environmental cause?

Use the slider below to set your donation amount

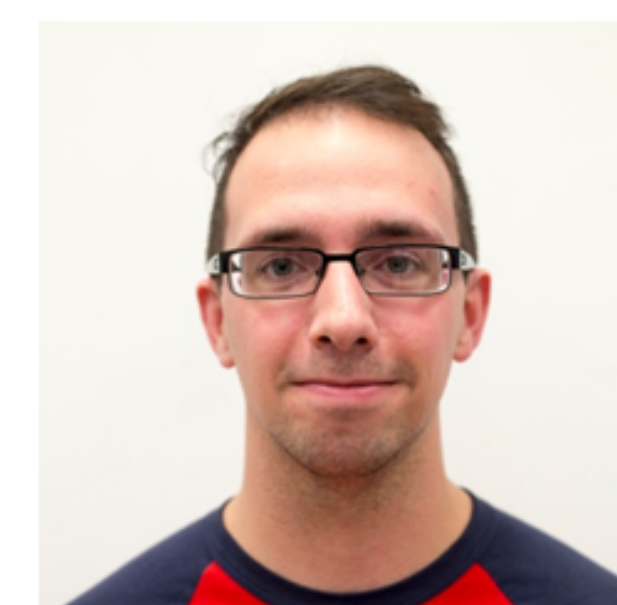


My name is Leonardo DiCaprio. You may know me from the movie Inception.

Did you know that more than 80% of Rutgers Students like you donate to an environmental cause?

Please use the slider below to set your donation amount.

### Injunctive



My name is James. I am a student here on campus just like you and a committed environmentalist.

I have a message for each of us.

**Make a donation to an environmental cause today.**

Use the slider below to set your donation amount.



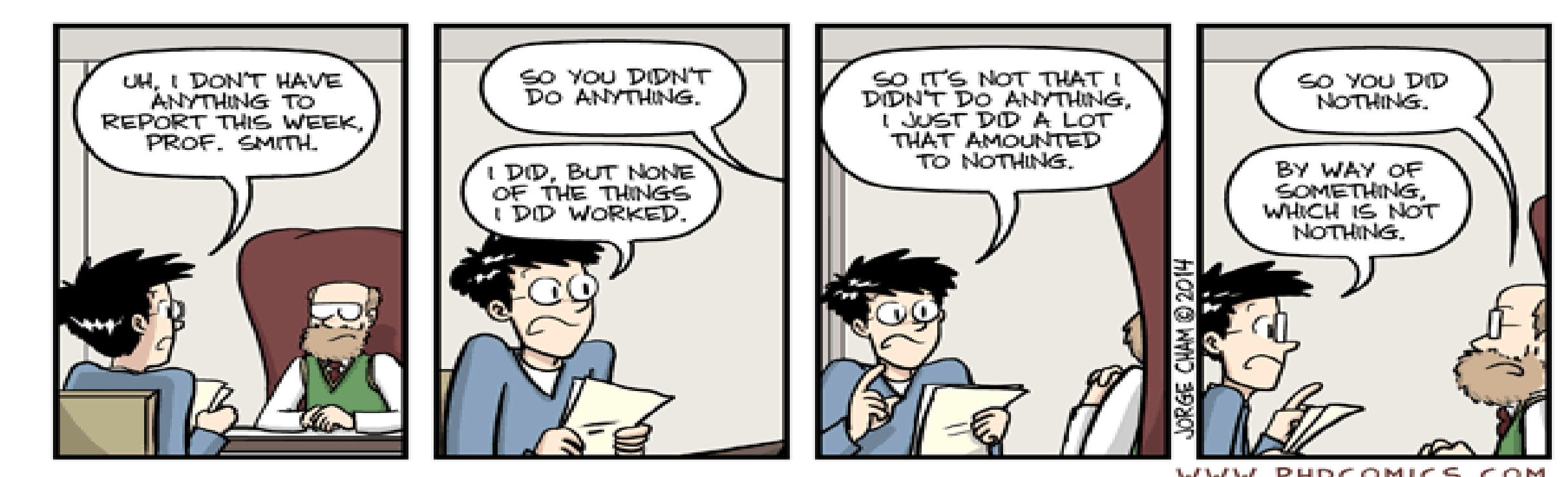
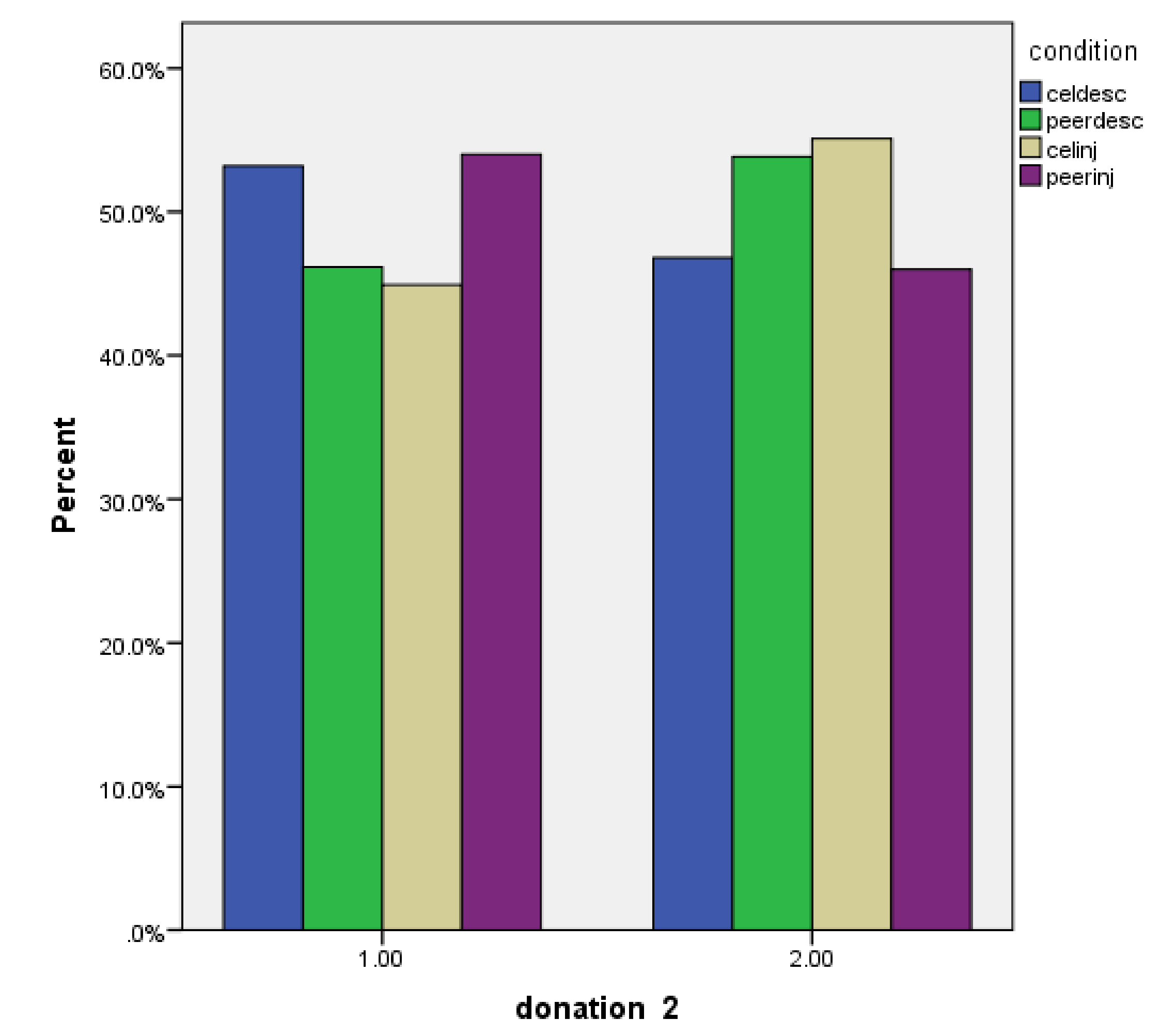
My name is Leonardo. I am an American actor and film producer and a committed environmentalist.

I have a message for you.

**Make a donation to an environmental cause today.**

Use the slider below to set your donation amount.

## Results



## Conclusion

This work should further understanding of the mechanisms of social influence and specifically how social norms and message source contribute to pro-sociality. A deeper understanding of how social influence affects decision-making is important because it is so ubiquitous, at the core of many human interactions.

Although our results did not show an effect of messenger and message type on hypothetical donations, our manipulation may not have been the most effective way at getting to the answer.

## Future Directions

- Does message source and message type matter?
- Can we find the correct way to tease this apart?

## References

1. Cialdini, R. B., Reno, R. R., & Kallgren, C. A. (1990). A focus theory of normative conduct: Recycling the concept of norms to reduce littering in public places. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58(6), 1015-1026. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.58.6.1015>

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