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## MRS Awards 2021

Applications of Research

**Winner:**

**Mindlab International & NSPCC**

**Using Impact and progress  
to drive charity donations**

## SUMMARY

The challenge of this project was to understand how the NSPCC can drive income while also building long-term warmth and trust.

The research was designed to understand brand perceptions, the drivers and barriers to giving and what attributes drive donations.

Questions around charitable donations often result in biased responses, as people are inclined to represent a more desirable view of their altruistic attitudes and behaviours. Therefore, the research needed to measure intuitive and implicit perceptions rather than purely rely on traditional self-report

Cluster analysis was used to uncover themes within imagery, based on the associations they intuitively communicated.

This research brought home the importance of communicating the difference the NSPCC are making for children. This has made a real difference through refreshed brand marketing objectives and alignment with brand level KPIs under their new organisational strategy.

The NSPCC have had great success with their 'Frontline' creative strategy where they show more about what they actually do for children

The research gave the NSPCC confidence to continue with key brand assets thus avoiding an expensive brand refresh.

Last year the NSPCC were one of top five 'most improved' brands in YouGov's CharityIndex rankings, which they have attributed to their refreshed strategy.

## SYNOPSIS

### Business objective

From 1999-2009, the NSPCC ran their 'Full-Stop' campaign, which was a big success at the time in putting the issue of child abuse on the agenda. However, the hard-hitting imagery and message focused on the problem more than the solution, without enough emphasis being placed on the positive outcomes the NSPCC achieves.

One key challenge of this project was to understand how the NSPCC can drive income in the short-term (traditionally by provoking a strong emotional response) while also building long-term warmth and trust. They needed to understand what perceptions can grow donations and be worked into the brand, without returning to the issues of Full-Stop.

### Research objectives

The research was designed to understand:

- Perceptions of the brand and cause
- Drivers and barriers to giving
- What attributes drive donations, and how can they be expressed visually?

### Research methodology

Questions around charitable donations often result in biased responses, as people are inclined to represent a more desirable view of their altruistic attitudes and behaviours (even to themselves). Because of this, Mindlab needed to a) measure people's intuitive and implicit perceptions rather than purely rely on traditional self-report, and b) assess responses to the NSPCC in a competitive context, including other popular UK charities.

As part of a broader research project together with Shift Design, 1,000 UK participants took part in an online experiment conducted by Mindlab, comprising of the following semi-implicit measures:

### Preference & perceptions

**Donation preference:** Pairs of charities were shown under time pressure, where people choose which they would rather donate to. This was repeated with different combinations. The decisions and response times showed us people's intuitive preferences and trade-offs between charities.

**Charity perceptions:** A reaction-time-based sorting task was used to measure how strongly 7 charities (including the NSPCC) were associated with 25 attributes. Participants saw charity-word pairs, and had to respond as quickly as possible to whether the word described the charity well. This allowed us to map out people's intuitive perceptions of the different charities.

### Imagery associations

Association fit: A second association test was used to measure how strongly 75 different images represented 25 attributes. Participants saw randomly sub-sampled image-word pairs, and had to respond under time pressure to whether the word described the image well.

NSPCC fit: The 75 images were also assessed in terms of their intuitive link to the NSPCC. Images flashed up individually, and participants had to respond to whether the image did or did not fit their idea of the NSPCC.

### Propositions & phrases

In addition to mapping out associations communicated by different images, we also assessed associations people had with potential NSPCC phrases.

## ANALYSIS

### Drivers of charity preference

To understand the qualities linked to charities people most want to support, we conducted a correlation analysis of the proportion of times charities were chosen in the 'donation preference' test against the association scores in the 'charity perceptions' test. This highlighted the extent different attributes are linked to donation intention. Highlighting the underlying links between perceptions and intended behaviour, rather than relying on self-report.

### Uncovering underlying themes in imagery

A cluster analysis (k-means clustering) was used to uncover themes within the imagery, based on the 'fit to key associations' test. The 75 images were mathematically grouped into 8 image clusters or 'themes', based on the associations they are intuitively communicating. This allowed the evaluation of imagery purely based on what they were communicating to participants, rather than make a-priori assumptions about different potential themes.

## THE FINDINGS

The legacy of the 'Full-Stop' campaign is still reflected in brand associations.

Words and images associated with the NSPCC were still more in line with the Full-Stop campaign than with more recent campaigns. People struggled to link 'hope' to the brand, showing that the NSPCC is more associated with flagging up child abuse, rather than preventing it.

There were however signs that the more recent campaigns are starting to have an effect. The NSPCC was more strongly linked to promoting a 'positive message', and people had a strong trust in the money reaching its cause, more so than for other children's charities.

Perceived 'sadness' of a charity is negatively correlated with donation intent.

The more strongly a charity was linked with 'sadness' the less likely they were to want to donate to this charity. This confirms that sad imagery can have a negative impact on longer-term support.

Perceived impact and personal connection are key in driving donations.

The research identified two key drivers of donation (see figure 1):

## PERSONAL & EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

### Making a difference / perceived positive impact

Showing positive interactions between adults and children strengthens key associations.

The imagery that was most intuitively linked to the NSPCC showed children in difficult situations and in despair. This type of imagery had a sense of urgency, but was seen as sad and emotive – precisely the attributes that were associated with weaker donation intention.

The cluster of images most strongly associated with donating focused on the NSPCC at work (see image A). This cluster makes the charity appear relevant today, inspiring, likeable, making real progress, and making a difference – allowing people to help and became the focus of the NSPCC Frontline strategy.

Every Childhood Is Worth Fighting For.

Aside from imagery, messages were assessed in terms of how well they represented the key drivers of donation intention. "Every Childhood Is Worth Fighting For" (the NSPCC's existing strapline) was the strongest message. It was clear and easy to understand, felt like a cause worth supporting, and highly relevant today. This message was also seen as particularly positive and likeable, helping people associate the NSPCC with positive outcomes rather than just a sad cause. The research highlighted another promising strapline – "We won't stop until child abuse stops" this packed an emotional punch and created a mental link back to the Full-Stop campaigns, contributing to brand recognition.

## APPLICATION

The NSPCC have been working on embedding insights from this research since 2019 and are proud now to be seeing evidence of genuine impact. Below are three examples of that.

### A renewed focus on impact and progress

Above all else, this research brought home the importance of communicating the difference they're making for children. Internal prioritisation of this focus is making a real difference, e.g.:

Refreshed brand marketing objectives – The NSPCC aims to drive relevance, affinity, and understanding of the impact and difference they make.

Questions on perceived impact and progress have been added to their brand tracker, and these metrics have been elevated to the level of brand profile KPIs under their new organisational strategy.

New impact pages were added to NSPCC.org this year, and there are plans to create videos focusing on communicating progress on the NSPCC cause.

#### 'Frontline' creative strategy

One of the key take-outs from the research was that the NSPCC needed to show more about what they actually do for children (the NSPCC at work' image cluster). This is now done through their 'Frontline' creative strategy. Their Head of Studio explains:

"We want people to feel that we're out in communities across the UK, at the forefront of child protection. We still demonstrate "need" but we don't over dramatise that – we mix real life stories with child actors so it feels like a real and authentic documentary – something everyone can relate to. We're actively showing where supporters' money is going by showing what we do. This increases our relevance and helps supporters understand our impact."

There has been great success with this strategy. In particular, it was the basis for the 'Still Here for Children' rapid response campaign (April 2020) in reaction to the global pandemic which featured direct appeals from frontline practitioners (See image B). Combined with an accompanying NSPCC Helpline awareness campaign also starring a frontline practitioner,

The 'Still Here for Children' campaign generated significant peaks on tracked measures of brand affinity and cut-through that had previously been in decline. The campaign performed so well that it was continued in use beyond the immediate crisis period into the September brand campaign and 2020 Christmas appeal, again faced by frontline practitioners.

Last year the NSPCC were one of top five 'most improved' brands in YouGov's CharityIndex rankings, which they have attributed in part to their refreshed strategy.

#### "We won't stop until child abuse stops"

The research gave the NSPCC confidence to continue with key brand assets including the strapline "Every childhood is worth fighting for", thus avoiding an expensive brand refresh.

The research highlighted another line of copy – "We won't stop until child abuse stops" – packed an emotional punch and created a mental link back to our Full-Stop campaigns, contributing to brand recognition. The NSPCC are also incorporating the line "We won't stop until child abuse stops" into their marketing. So far, they've seen success using it in mass participation events marketing, and have included a variation in recent online safety core content and new assets they're creating for a 2021 summer campaign.

| Attribute         | Correlation with donation intention |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Close To My Heart | 0.99                                |
| Making Progress   | 0.97                                |
| Clear Goals       | 0.97                                |
| I Understand      | 0.97                                |
| Hear a lot about  | 0.97                                |
| Needs money       | 0.96                                |
| Inspiring         | 0.96                                |
| I can help        | 0.96                                |
| Urgent            | 0.95                                |
| Relevant to me    | 0.95                                |
| ...               |                                     |
| Emotive           | 0.51                                |
| Government funded | 0.45                                |
| Sad               | -0.38                               |

