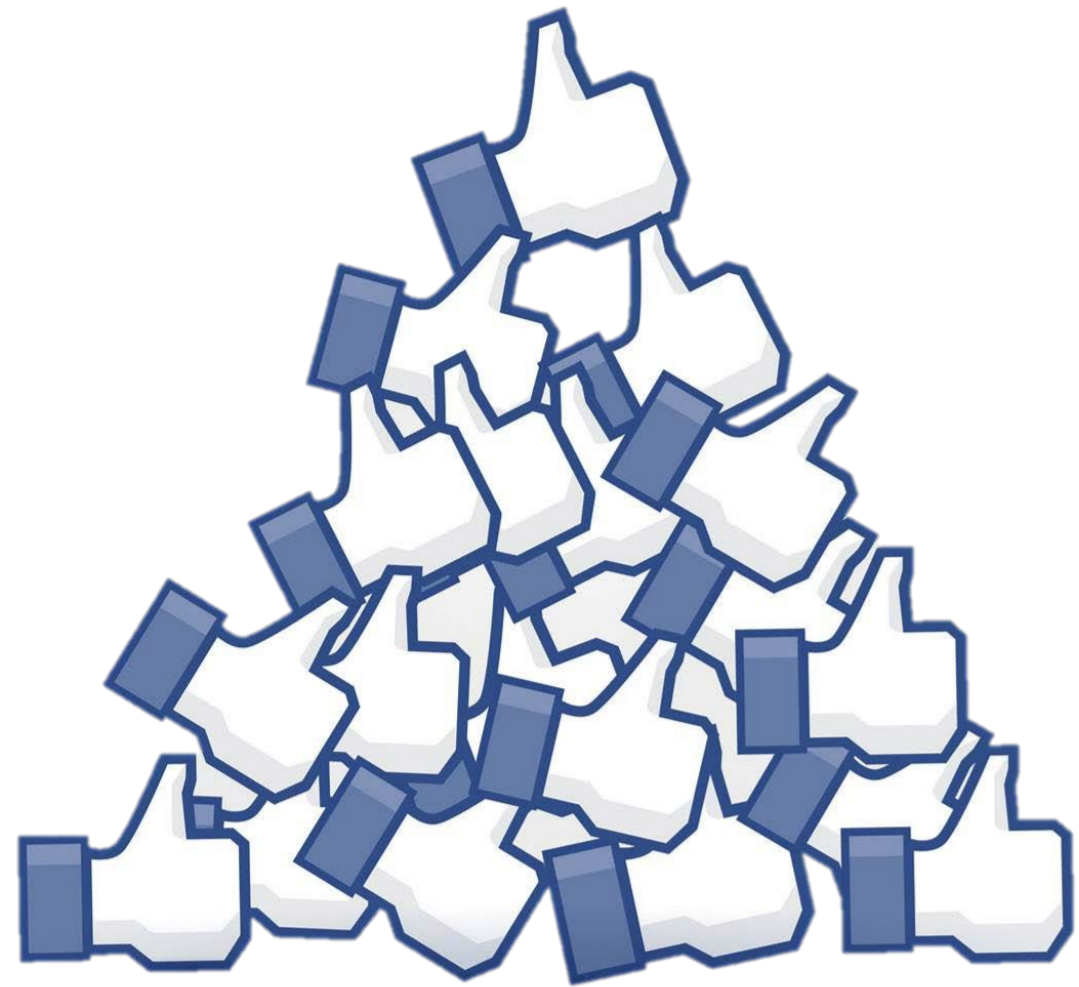


On the Consequences of Slacktivism – The Moderating Role of Social Observability

Laurens van Gestel & Madelijn Strick. Social, Health and Organizational Psychology, Utrecht University, the Netherlands



Utrecht University



What is *slacktivism*?

Slacktivism is a low-cost action in support of charities. It has been criticized as philanthropic half-measures in which people contribute with tweets and shares rather than by opening their wallets. We investigated the consequences of slacktivism on more meaningful types of support and distinguished between two types of charitable support:

- **Token support (TS):** a small form of support requiring little effort or cost (e.g. liking a charity on Facebook or wearing a bracelet signaling support)
- **Meaningful support (MS):** a form of support requiring substantial effort or cost (e.g. donating time or money)



Aim of the Study

We investigated the interaction effect of social observability of TS and MS on the proportion of MS given to charities.

Hypothesis

The lowest proportion of MS will be observed when private MS is requested after public TS has been given.

Rationale

When asked for TS in public, **impression management motives** become activated and people want to present themselves positively to others. Hence, people will give TS to build their reputation and we expect that they will follow through with MS when this is also requested in public. However, when MS is requested in private, impression management will not make people inclined to give MS.

When asked for TS in private, **self-perception motives** become activated and people will derive their attitudes from their own behavior. Thus, once people have given private TS, they will be inclined to believe that their own values correspond with those of the charitable cause. Therefore, we expect that people will follow through with MS regardless of its social observable nature.

Method

Participants: $N = 66$.

Design: 2 (social observability TS: private vs. public) x 2 (social observability MS: private vs. public) within-subjects design.

Procedure: Participants saw 48 charitable causes and were first asked whether they were willing to like the cause (as an act of TS), and subsequently whether they were willing to donate 20 cents to this cause (as an act of MS). Across the 48 charities, social observability was manipulated for both TS and MS. Participants were coupled together and were informed that the other participant would see their socially observable choices.

Results

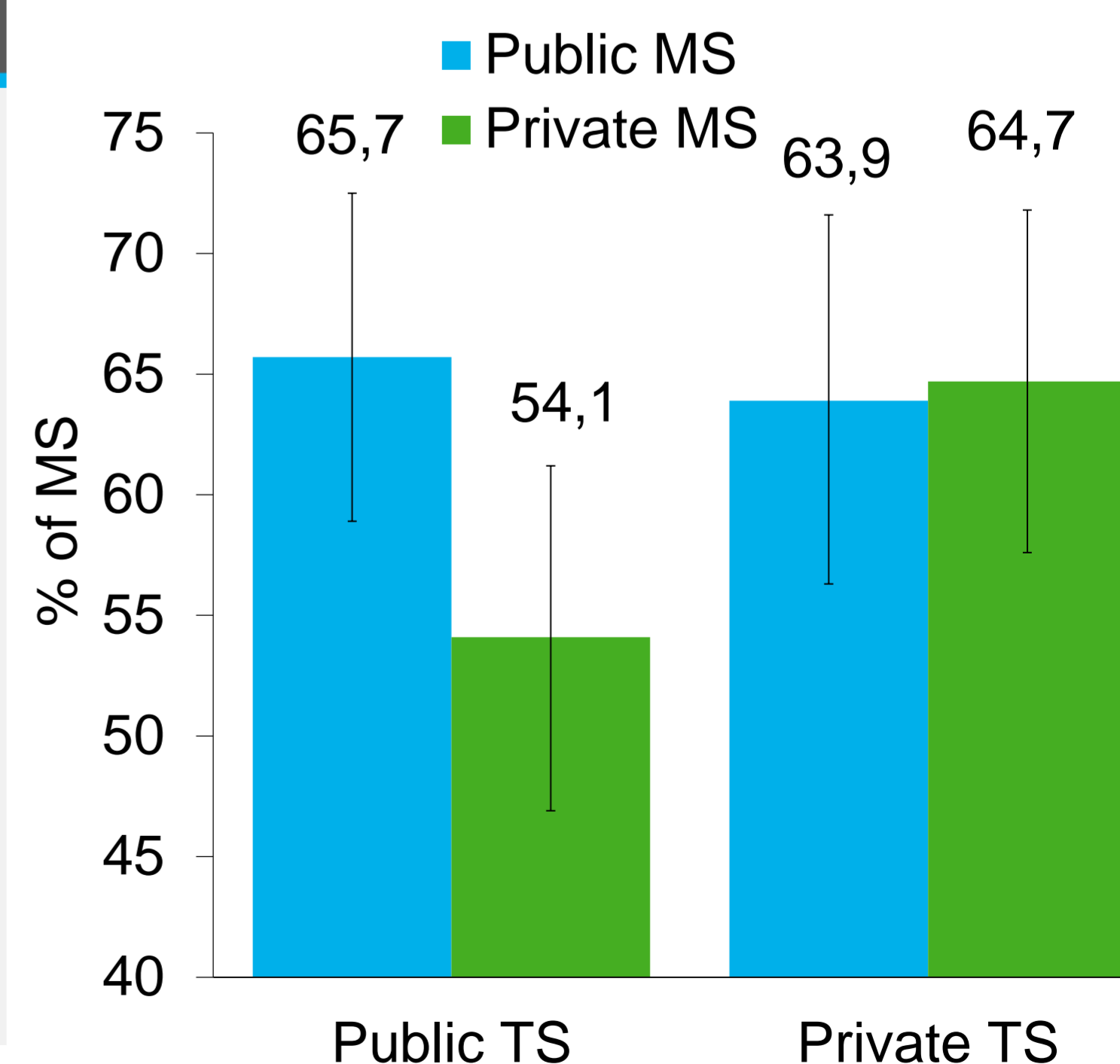
We found a significant two-way interaction effect of social observability of TS and MS on the proportion of MS given TS, $F(1, 65) = 6.29, p = .015, \eta_p^2 = .09$.

The proportion of private MS given public TS was significantly lower than the proportion of public MS given public TS, $F(1, 65) = 10.05, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .13$, and also significantly lower than the proportion of private MS given private TS, $F(1, 65) = 11.51, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$.

Conclusion

In this study we show that people are most likely to slack off when asked for private MS after they have already given TS in public. We show that people are generally likely to follow through with MS after TS has been given, but that the extent to which people do so is dependent on both the social observable nature of TS and the social observable nature of MS. Given the abundance of possibilities to give public TS, charitable organizations should carefully consider the trade-off between raising awareness and raising funds. All in all, as indicated by multiple campaigns, 'likes' will never directly lead to saving lives.

The proportion of MS given TS as a function of social observability of TS and social observability of MS



Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals

Contact: l.c.vangestel@uu.nl