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Research Background

Our approach looks beyond standard giving metrics that focus primarily on tracking financial donations to registered nonprofits, which exclude most giving and givers. Instead we have begun mapping the giving ecosystem in its true abundance, by looking into many more kinds of giving (including time, items and social advocacy in addition to money) and in many more contexts (including, giving to community groups and non-family individuals in addition to nonprofits), revealing a complex and nearly universal culture of giving.

With a view toward expanding the social sector’s notion of what generosity is and how it should be measured, GivingPulse was designed to investigate a broad range of giving behaviors and sentiments through weekly surveys on a sample of 100 respondents. Responses from these surveys provide a unique set of timely insights into the state of generosity through nearly real-time monitoring and analyses. They will allow the sector to explore how various events, interventions, crises, and demographic factors impact or correlate with generosity.

This unique survey-based study expands on prior GivingTuesday studies of American giving:

1. To assess a wider range of acts of generosity, covering the giving of money, items, volunteering, and/or advocacy, whether it is for registered charities, non-profit organizations, and/or for individual people in need.
2. To continuously track changes in these behaviors and attitudes as they shift due to world events, activities, triggers, and/or seasonality.

Goals

Through this project, GivingTuesday is actively seeking to understand and share insights around the nature of generosity in all its forms and to expand the collaborative research environment in the social sector. This data will contribute to understanding various dimensions of these behaviors, such as:

- What these behaviors are;
- How they are managed;
- The extent to which they are emergent;
- The form they take in different communities;
- How they evolve in real time.
The survey

The sample

The sample consists of 18 to 85 year olds who have lived in the US for at least the past 12 months. The geographic coverage of the sample includes all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia. The sample quotas match age, gender, and geographic distribution to the US population, according to the most recent US census. GivingPulse has been in the field weekly since February 14, 2022.

The sample is recruited online from a IPSOS pre-recruited panel of respondents developed for the purposes of conducting market research studies. This panel owner selects a number of respondents according to prescribed demographic (age, gender, and region) quotas, who are then invited to participate in GivingPulse. This ensures better representation of the actual American population. Because this is an online survey, it likely under-represents populations without regular Internet access. These are known to be older Americans and poorer, less educated folks.\(^1\) The weekly sample size is approximately \(n=100\).

Once the sample is delivered, our vendor reviews the distribution of key demographics of the respondents in it, and adds respondent-level weights to account for any discrepancies between the sample and US census population distribution (which may occur due to bias and small sample size). Typically, the weights are not so significant because we target a representative profile right from the start with the panel provider. Respondents are not included or excluded based on past giving behavior, so as to capture a wider range of behaviors in GivingPulse responses. Inaccurate responses are excluded after data collection ("speeders" – e.g. respondents who rush through the survey, inconsistent or extreme respondents). The average time to complete was 10 minutes.

Surveys use a sample of the target population. Such a sample may not perfectly reflect the full population. Conducting another survey, with a different sample may produce slightly different results. These variations are referred to as “sample error” and may vary or be different between studies by several percentage points for any reported measure.

\(^1\) https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/methodology/collecting-survey-data/internet-surveys/
Upsampling

The weekly sample size is increased from 100 to 600 to track #GivingTuesday related behaviors as well as end-of-year giving patterns broadly speaking, once a year:

- During 10 weeks between October 2022 and January 2023
- During 9 weeks between November 2023 and January 2024

As of April 2024, the total sample size is approximately 18,300 respondents.

Sample reporting

Data is reported on two different basis:

- Aggregated across many weeks for a larger overall sample to bring greater robustness and to offer the opportunity to review key sub-samples with sufficient base sizes
- Trended over time, using a rolling 4-week window to provide a balance for the affordability of the overall sample, for providing a stable reporting base, versus carrying out-of-date information too long.
  - We combine the first 4 weeks and plot the first data point.
  - In each subsequent week, we add the latest data and drop the data from three weeks prior (i.e. add week 5 and drop week 1, add week 6 and drop week 2, and so on)

All behavior is self-reported. Respondents are not perfect rational machines, and results may not exactly reflect factual reality. It is important to look at comparative differences between results and over time to understand the implied insights. If a business decision depends or hinges on a precise number, extra caution should be used.

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire is divided in the following sections:

- For the first 80% of the questionnaire, we have a fixed, standard questionnaire, focusing on generosity behaviors and attitudes.
- For the next 10%, we have a “flexi-section”.
- The last 10% is the standardized demographics and classification questions.

For tracking, it was important to keep the questions the same to allow for comparison of results over time. However, we have some flexibility with the end of the survey. This “flexi-section” near the end, cannot affect the answers already collected per respondent before. Thus, in the flexi-section, we can add and remove ad hoc questions which are relevant for the time, and/or represent a quick interest (which may not warrant on-going
tracking). Currently, the GivingPulse dashboard contains information pertaining only to non-flexi questions.

**Generosity taxonomy**

The GivingPulse generosity taxonomy is divided into giving types and recipient types. This taxonomy is the basis of the questionnaire; it is used to identify generosity behaviors and attitudes of respondents. Giving types include:

1. Monetary: donating dollars
2. Items: giving things, other than money
3. Time: volunteering their time
4. Advocacy: recommending, encouraging, endorsing or socially publicizing a recipient’s activity

In addition to the above core categories, GivingPulse also asks respondents about other types of giving including donations of blood or other body parts, as well as financial contributions specifically to politicians or political groups.

Those who are at the receiving end of these giving behaviors are:

1. Registered charities: formal organizations that are legally established in the eyes of the government
2. Organized or structured community group: informal organizations that are not legally established (e.g. student associations, community associations)
3. Individuals: these are individuals who are not part of any organized or structured fundraising (e.g. a neighbor, a person on the street)

Each of these giving combinations can have local or global geographical scope of interest.

The chart below summarizes the GivingPulse’s giving taxonomy.
MONETARY

Monetary donation to registered charity

Monetary donation to organized or structured community group which is not specifically a registered charity

Monetary donation to someone (other than family) which is not part of any organized or structured fund-raising

ITEMS

Gave things other than money to a registered charity.

Gave things other than money to help others via organized or structured community group which is not specifically a registered charity.

Gave things other than money to someone (other than family) which is not part of any organized or structured fund-raising.

TIME

Volunteered time to or served a registered charity.

Volunteered time to an organized or structured community group which is not specifically a registered charity.

Volunteered time to help support someone (other than family) which is not part of any organized or structured fund-raising.

ADVOCACY

Recommended, encouraged others, endorsed, or socially publicized an activity of a legal formally-structured charity.

Recommended, encouraged others, endorsed, or socially publicized an activity of an organized or structured community group which is not specifically a registered charity.

Recommended, encouraged others, endorsed, or socially publicized some ad hoc independent activity to help others, which is not part of any organized collective initiative.
Analysis methodology

We aim to track giving behaviors and attitudes by creating clusters and establishing indices.

Clustering methodology: Generosity Profiles

How are the generosity profiles defined?

We use a clustering analysis technique method called “k-means clustering” to group respondents in our dataset into distinct groups based on shared characteristics.

With the GivingPulse survey data, clustering is hard to visualize since we cluster based on many survey questions and it therefore takes place in a very high dimensional space. The algorithm generates three cluster centroids that move through the space containing data points until each data point is assigned to the centroid that is closest to its mean. The result of this process is three cluster centroids each representing a distinct group of points and their attributes.

The survey questions used for the clustering are those that relate to respondents’ behaviors and attitudes towards generosity. These are the same questions that are used to generate the generosity indices. Once the clusters have been determined, we can examine the similarities and differences between the clusters in terms of behavior, attitudes, and demographics based on the position of the cluster centroids and by observing the distribution of demographic traits within each cluster. This is how we generate “profiles”.

Motivation and interpretation

In the GivingPulse survey, we define the clusters primarily by their behavior and attitude characteristics, and then examine their demographic breakdown. From a practical perspective, clustering analysis can help us determine which types of people behave similarly and therefore may respond similarly to different types of crises, events, or solicitations. This could be useful for fundraisers who wish to target specific demographics, groups wishing to engage more volunteers, or journalists looking to augment a narrative relating to generosity or crisis response.

From a research perspective, clustering analysis helps reveal underlying behavioral patterns in the survey sample and indicate broader trends in the target population. In the case of novel or unexpected results, it can help raise additional questions for social science researchers about motivations for generosity, civic participation, and
relationships between individuals’ attitudes and their behaviors, to name a few possibilities.

If the behavior, attitude, and demographic composition of each cluster is stable between months/time periods, we can examine how the proportion of respondents in each cluster shifts from month to month. For example, if the number of people who are exhibiting an “average generosity” profile decreases between months, we can look at the changes in relative size of the other two clusters to see if the sample has become more or less generous overall.

If the behavior and attitude composition of the clusters is stable while the demographic composition is not, we can examine which sub-groups appear to have changed behaviors over the time period and how this may be related to recent events. For example, if the religiosity of respondents does not appear to vary much between clusters in one month but appears to be higher in a high generosity cluster the following month, we may want to look into events over the relevant time period that would push more religious people to be more generous, such as a holiday or period of religious observance.

From a practical perspective, clustering analysis can help us determine which types of people behave similarly and therefore may respond similarly to different types of crises, events, or solicitations. This could be useful for fundraisers who wish to target specific demographics, groups wishing to engage more volunteers, or journalists who wish to highlight trends among specific populations in times of crisis.